

# The Solano Historian

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## Solano Historian

The *Solano Historian* is published twice yearly at Vallejo, California, by the Solano County Historical Society.

Edited by

**Matthew and Lee Fountain  
and Robert Allgood.**

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The purpose of the *Solano Historian* is to stimulate the enjoyment and preservation of history by publishing pictures, stories, articles, and letters furnished by its readers. Much valuable material that would flesh out our knowledge of the past is lost each year because those who might save it either do not realize its value or lack the motivation to take any immediate action. The *Solano Historian* will supply the motivation by showing there is an appreciative audience for such material and that people are intensely interested in items relating to their own background, that jog their memory, remind them of memorable events, and satisfy their curiosity.

Readers who furnish material for publication will find they are amply rewarded by their own feeling of satisfaction and the recognition earned by their contribution.

The *Solano Historian* is now soliciting material of Solano and North Bay interest for future issues. More details concerning this may be obtained by contacting President Henry Higham or Lee Fountain. Comments on this issue are also welcome.

The Society does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of statements or opinions of contributions although every effort is made to be historically correct.

*Solano County Historical Society*  
P. O. Box 922, Vallejo, CA 94590



### President's Message

Dear Members,

What more can we say about a man who is referred to as "Mr. Solano County History," and who has just been toasted at a testimonial dinner? There is much to say about Ernie Wichels, a man who was toasted for his many years as historian, lecturer, active member of so many worthy organizations that one must ask, "How does he do it?" Then, there are the twenty-five years of writing a column for the *Vallejo Times Herald*, never once missing a deadline. Each of these columns is so varied and so exciting. History of our county has been documented by Ernie. What more can be added to all of these attributes?

We add our congratulations to those of the many others who honored Ernie at Dan Foley on November 9, 1988. We recall Ernie, with his beloved Anne at his side, as the perfect host for so many of our events. Anne with her delightful sense of humor and Ernie with his interesting stories entertained us all from the early years of the Society. Ernie has made more contributions to our Society than anyone we know.

At the Dan Foley Testimonial dinner Judge Ellis Randall read the following proclamation from the Solano County Historical Society.

Whereas

Ernest D. Wichels served as President of the Solano County Historical Society for the year 1963-64,

Whereas

He served on the Board of directors from 1961 to the present with devotion and diligence,

Whereas

He writes in "Pages From the Past" of local heroes and villains, of entrepreneurs

and stable boys with his superb newspaper columns always deserving of the Award of Merit granted by the California Historical Society on March 20, 1977,

Whereas

He wrote with his colleague Sue Lemon two volumes *From Side Wheelers to Nuclear Power* and *St. Peter's Chapel*, thereby recording in permanent form the story of the shipbuilding achievements of Mare Island Naval Shipyard and the story of the oldest Navy Chapel in the United States,

Whereas

He edited the *Note Book*, the monthly publication of the Solano County Historical Society, publicizing the past of each segment of the County equally,

Whereas

By countless appearances and personal example he has carried the message of the importance of local history to young and old, neophyte and scholar alike, with skill and effect,

The Solano County Historical Society membership salutes Ernest D. Wichels with its deepest appreciation, respect, and gratitude for his generosity, talent, dedication, achievements, responsibility, precise recording of historical facts, and hard work. Ernest, we love you.

Hank Higham, President 1988-89

## About Our Authors

**M. Clyde Low** is librarian at Solano Community College and chairman of the Solano County Historical Roundtable. His special interest is in doing primary research on the history of early Green Valley and Suisun Valley.

**Thomas Lucy** is a historian at the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum. He is head of cataloging and accessioning for the Museum as well as curator of the photographic collection.

**Sumi Okahara** is supervising student teachers and teaching courses at Holy Names and Chapman Colleges after completing twenty-three years of teaching in Benicia. She is a graduate of the University of California at Davis. Before entering teaching she worked as a social worker.

## Our Cover

For explanation see bottom of page 3.



## St. Gertrude's Academy in Rio Vista 1876-1930

The founding of a fine academic boarding school for girls came as the direct result of the donation from one of Rio Vista's earliest pioneers, Mr. Joseph Bruning. A German immigrant, Bruning became a large landholder near Rio Vista as well as being half owner of a laundry business and a partner in a large lumber company.

Mr. Bruning was the father of three daughters, a fact which explains his interest in education. Although he had also donated land for Rio Vista's first public school in 1862, in order to secure the kind of education he wished for his daughters, he donated land for the establishment of a Catholic school. Then he petitioned Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco for help. The Archbishop at that moment had no order with personnel free to go to Rio Vista, but the Mother Superior of the Sisters of Mercy was aware of some Sisters in her Order from New Hampshire who wished to come west. An invitation went out to Sister Camillus and her group in New England. The Sisters arrived in 1876 and immediately set to work on their new project. As Superior, Mother Camillus served the academy until 1911.

The academy was named St. Gertrude's because Mrs. Bruning's first name was Gertrude. The usual subjects were taught but none of the important cultural subjects was neglected. Piano and instrumental music were taught as were painting, choir and chorus, creative writing, and fine needlework. Soon students came from the Mother Lode country where the miners were anxious to have their daughters educated not too far from home. Affluent farmers from Williams, Chico, Red Bluff, as well as merchants from San Francisco and Sacramento sent their daughters to the new Sisters of Mercy School in the small delta town. Before long, a few wealthy students from Central America registered in the new school.

From the 1878 *The Gleaners Journal*, a "Historic Sketch of Rio Vista from its Earliest Times to the Present," the earliest written record of the new academy is given.

### "St. Gertrude's Academy.

**This Academy for young ladies, under the direction of the Sisters of Mercy, is beautifully situated on an eminence in the pleasant and accessible town of Rio Vista. The location is remarkably healthful, the building new and well furnished with**

**all that contributes to the health and comfort of the pupils. The pleasure grounds are extensive and well-adapted to healthful exercise. Pupils of all persuasions are equally received. The course of instructions embodies all the useful branches of a solid education. The academy building was erected in 1876 by the munificence of Mr. Jos. Bruning, and was formally dedicated by Bishop Alemany on the 10th day of December, 1876. The following statement of attendance during the past term has been furnished us.**

<b>Pupils in Young Ladies Academy</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Pupils in Boys' Department</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Pupils in Primary Department</b>	<b>35</b>

**Total attendance 115**

**There were 26 boarding pupils last term, and several applications have been made for the next session, January 6th, 1879."**

It is apparent the school had community support because the public school enrollment mentioned in the same publication was listed as 107. The school population must have come from miles around because an informal census of 1878 lists Rio Vista with 577 total population.

Another evidence of the school's growth recorded in *The Gleaners* is "St. Gertrude's Academy — additional Buildings \$800. Charles Davis, builder." Mr. Davis was a prominent builder, being listed as builder for half the new buildings constructed in 1878.

Little information was gathered of the formative years of St. Gertrude's although the enrollment increased significantly. It was in 1902 that the academy with great pomp celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a program that gave at least every student who passed some mention and contained a most impressive list of prizes, honors, and recognition for their year's achievements. Eight girls were graduated from the secondary division.

It is of interest to note Dan White, Solano County's superintendent of schools, was asked to speak at this significant program, an honor usually reserved for parochial personnel.

This commencement program was printed in *The River News* of June 27, 1902, as follows.



The cover of this issue shows St. Gertrude's Academy and its location in respect to Rio Vista and the Sacramento River. St. Gertrude's is the large building at the extreme left in the upper lithograph. The geometric garden with fountain in the lower lithograph is artistic fancy, which may explain the inconsistent perspective in the lithograph. The post card on this page at the left shows St. Gertrude's after additional building. The lithographs are from Thompson and West's New Historical Atlas of Solano County —1877

## St. Gertrude's Academy—Class of '02

An important event in the lives of several young people transpired last Tuesday morning at St. Gertrude's Academy when eight young ladies received presents, medals and degrees of honor at the hands of the able teachers of that institution.

Year after year has rolled by in the history of this Academy until the quarter century mark has been reached and passed and honors conferred upon the twenty-fifth class of graduates on that anniversary.

No little energy nor means were expended in the training of the pliable minds and hands of the willing pupils during their past study, nor in the preparation of the exercises of the day which marked the end of another chapter in the history of the school and which reflected much credit upon the honored graduates and honor upon the loving Sisters.

The Academy has made much marked advancement since its humble inception until now it has reached spacious proportions, and aims to keep up and in touch with the institutions of learning of our glorious State. Recent improvements have been made by the addition of a Chapel, which is on the road to completion, and a beautiful auditorium in which Tuesday's exercises were held.

The auditorium is on the lower floor of the lately erected north wing and is conveniently situated. The rostrum was decorated with the class motto, "Honor," in silver letters and '77 and '02 in similar color on either side and below, and golden lace drapery, and ornamented with vases containing choice flowers, and five pianos on which several beautiful euphonious quintets were played by graduates and under graduates.

An enjoyable feature of the exercises was recitations in concert as well as vocal music by intermediate and junior pupils. The essays by the three young ladies, the Misses Lizzie Mathiesen, Bessie Flammer and Mable Ruble, were short, to the point and very creditable to the fair damsels.

Miss Laura Orth reflected much credit to her jubilee address and vocal solo, as did also Miss Hazel Swears in her solo. The drama, "Aunt Susan Jones" was true to every day life. Miss Smith's "Robert of Sicily" was a very able recitation and a great deal of firmness and character was displayed by this young lady.

The program in full was as follows:

Jubilee Address..... Miss Laura Orth  
Instrumental, "Huguenots," .....Misses E. Kinkade,  
M. Ruble, A. McCarthy, L. Smith, G. Campbell  
Vocal Music, "Seguidilla," .....Miss H. Swears  
Miss Orth, accompanist  
Recitation, "Pamilla" .....Intermediary Class  
Vocal Music, "Vesper Story," .....Junior Pupils.  
Miss Russell, accompanist  
Essay, "The Influence of Music," Miss L. Mathisen  
Instrumental, "Tannhauser," .....Misses E. Kulper,  
L. Jones, D. Hood, H. Tharsing, A. Drouin  
Recitation and song, "Queen Mab," Junior Pupils

### DRAMA, "CALPURNIA,"

Calpurnia.....H. Swears  
Caesar .....Pauline Crump  
St. Chrysostom .....Mable Ruble  
Glaucus .....Lottie Smith  
Ansonius Mycon.....Ella Kinkade  
Egyptians .....A. Johnston, I. Russell,  
H. Brown, D. Oliva, L. Linderman, K. Dolan,  
L. Richardson, M. Santa Cruz, L. LaFrance  
Soldiers .....R. Ferguson, O. Barrett,  
L. Millsaps, D. Hood, N. LaFrance, accompanist.

Instrumental, "Transcription," .....Misses B.  
Flammer, H. Brown, L. LaFrance, L. Jones,  
O. Barrett  
Vocal, "Shamrock," .....Intermediate Class  
Essay, "Honor," .....Miss Bessie Flammer  
Instrumental, "Delta Kappa," .....Misses L. Mathisen,  
L. Smith, M. Spinney, D. Oliva, G. Campbell  
Vocal Solo, "Choir Invisible," .....Miss L. Orth,  
Miss H. Swears, Accompanist  
Essay, "The Golden Rule," .....Miss Mabel Ruble  
Instrumental, "Witches Dance," .....Misses D. Oliva,  
I. Russell, N. LaFrance, A. McCarthy, L. Richardson  
Vocal, "Angelus"  
Recitation, "Robert of Sicily," .....Miss L. Smith  
Instrumental, "Dinorah," .....Misses L. Mathisen,  
L. Orth, E. Kinkade, H. Swears, A. McCarthy

### "AUNT SUSAN JONES"

Aunt Susan.....Miss Ida Dambacher  
Mrs. Markley .....Miss Leola Burrows  
Arabella Markley .....Miss Margie Spinney  
Anna Wilson.....Miss Bessie Flammer  
Mr. Saldefrac .....Miss Mabel Tregidgo

At the conclusion of the program Rev. Father J.J. Gannon made a few remarks to the audience and graduates, conferred graduating honors on and presented diplomas and medals to Misses Bessie Flammer, Ella Kinkade, Lizzie Mathisen, Mabel Ruble, Charlotte Smith, Pauline Crump, Hazel Swears, and Laura Orth, and distributed the many other medals and prizes.

Father Gannon then introduced County Superintendent of Schools Dan H. White of Fairfield, who addressed the graduates and assembly. Mr. White made a very able little speech which was appreciated by all. He has the welfare of the pupils and all institutions of learning at heart.

The following is the list of medals awarded besides the regular medals presented the graduates, and also the list of prizes and promotions:

### MEDALS AWARDED.

Hazel Swears, Rhetoric and Composition, by Rev. P. Quinn.  
Mary Morris, Mathematics, by a friend.  
Lizzie Mathiesen, Literature, by Rev. P. Quinn  
Hettie Brown, Excellence.  
Ella McGraugh, Bible History, by Rev. J.J. Gannon  
Leola Burrows, Art.  
Delia Sevini, Painting.  
Carrie Herr, Christian Doctrine, by a friend  
Dottie Hood, Deportment.  
Leana Jones, Improvement.  
Onada Barrett, Good Conduct.  
Agnes McCarthy, Music.  
Lucy Richardson, Improvement in Music.  
Eleanor Kulper  
Hazel Tharsing, best examination in 7th grade.  
Valeria Rocher, best examination in 5th grade.

### PRIZES AWARDED

Bessie Flammer, History, Botany, Algebra, Geometry.  
Ella Kinkade, Physics, History, French, Algebra.  
Hazel Swears, Geometry, Literature, History, Physics.  
Mabel Ruble, Physics, Rhetoric, Geometry, Latin.  
Lottie Smith, Physics, Literature, Rhetoric, Botany.  
Laura Orth, History, Literature, Composition, Painting.  
Pauline Crump, History, Rhetoric, Botany, Literature.  
Mary Morris, Algebra, Physics.



Ruth Ferguson, Mathematics, Rhetoric.  
 Georgie Campbell, Latin, Algebra.  
 Margie Spinney, Classics, Rhetoric.  
 Josefa Pineda, Literature, Rhetoric.  
 Arthur Larsen, Mathematics.  
 A. Oliva, Civil Government, Bible History.  
 H. Brown, United States History, Spelling.  
 S. Milsaps, Mathematics, Physiology.  
 Ella McGraugh, Etymology, Arithmetic.  
 Zilla Garfield, Spelling, Etymology.  
 Annie Nunes, Botany, Algebra.  
 Goldie Elliott, Civil Government, Etymology.  
 Leola Burrows, Grammar, Botany.  
 Dottie Hood, Classics, Etymology.  
 Svena Peterson, History, Arithmetic.  
 Mary Santa Cruz, Classics, Spelling.  
 Lydia Reese, History, Physiology.  
 Lucy Richardson, Grammar, Classics.  
 E. Kulper, Physiology, Christian Doctrine.  
 Lilian LaFrance, Etymology, Classics.  
 Leanna Jones, Spelling, History.  
 M. McCormick, Christian Doctrine, Spelling.  
 Annie McCormick, History, Classics.  
 I. Linderman, Physiology, Christian Doctrine.  
 Ida Dambacker, Arithmetic, Classics.  
 Irene Russell, Etymology, History.  
 Mabel Tregidgo, History, Spelling.  
 Delia Sevini, Christian Doctrine, Classics.  
 May McGraugh, Physiology, Spelling.  
 Sadie Downey, Christian Doctrine, Spelling.  
 Kathleen Dolan, Geography, Spelling.  
 T. Oliva, Christian Doctrine, Spelling.  
 A. Johnson, Book-keeping, Reading.  
 Eva Gunther, Grammar, Spelling.  
 Pearl Howard, Physiology, Geography.  
 N. LaFrance, Arithmetic, Spelling.  
 Onada Barrett, Book-keeping, Reading.  
 Alice Druin, Reading, Christian Doctrine.  
 Clara White, Spelling, Christian Doctrine.  
 Philomena Pedro, Reading, Spelling.

#### BOYS DEPARTMENT      AWARDED PRIZES

Michael McCormick, Spelling, Arithmetic.  
 John Murphy, Spelling, Arithmetic.  
 Thomas Reese, Spelling, Arithmetic.  
 Frank Amus, Reading, Physiology.  
 Emil Drouin, Arithmetic, Reading.  
 Willis Hanson, Writing, Reading.  
 Juliun Kulper, Writing.  
 Edward Grump, Writing.  
 Martin Coty, Reading, Writing.  
 Manuel Mosquite, Spelling, Writing.

In addition to listing prize and medal winners, *The River News* also named seventy-three girls and sixteen boys who had been promoted, and showed ratings of 81 to 97 for the older girls. The ratings for the boys and younger girls were omitted. Nearly all the older students named were also on the listing of the prize and medal winners.

The following June, 1903, seven students were graduated—three boarders and four day students, including two boys. Early in the twentieth century little emphasis was placed on high school graduation for girls so even if the number of graduates did not seem to grow much, the actual numbers of boarders and students did in-

crease. This year's program reviewed in *The River News* mentioned the largest audience to witness the commencement program in the New Academy Hall. New buildings had been added and the grounds so improved until "now it has reached magnificent proportions." The enthusiastic news article went on to say "The superior educational qualifications of the institution ... will fit them[the students] for any position in the future life." The commencement program, like that of the previous year, lasted three hours.

Because the increased yearly enrollment made it impossible for the teaching Sisters to handle all the teaching assignments, secular faculty members were recruited,—Professor Mansfield, instrumental music, Mrs. J.T. Graham, elocution, and Mrs. A. Gregory of Oakland Conservatory, vocal music.

The Sisters stressed a wide variety of subjects including Latin, the Classics, botany, literature, rhetoric, composition, painting, Bible history, etymology, in addition to the usual general grammar, foreign language, mathematics, science, and history. It appeared inevitable that there would be in time emphasis on creative writing. The organization of a literary association was enough of an event to warrant a story in the *River News*.

**The River News**  
**Rio Vista, CA.**

**September 28, 1906-1,2**

#### St. Gertrude's Academy

Last Wednesday evening the members of the Academic and Commercial Departments of St. Gertrude's Academy held a meeting for the purpose of inaugurating a Literary Society. The Rio College Literary Association being organized the following officers were elected. President; Vere Grieve, Vice-President; Anna Seaton, Treasurer; Annie Quinn, Secretary; Tessie Olive. The members will hold a meeting Friday evening during which a plan for literary work, etc. will be arranged.

This organization became responsible for several editions each year of a literary journal *Hill Crest*. The students obviously submitted some class assignments for publication, but many of the stories are typical fantasies of young adolescent girls. All in all they give a pleasant picture of young women trying their hands at the genteel profession of lady author. Many tried poetry in quite a sentimental vein. One Bertha White of the class of '09 submitted the following poem:

#### When the Fleet Comes In

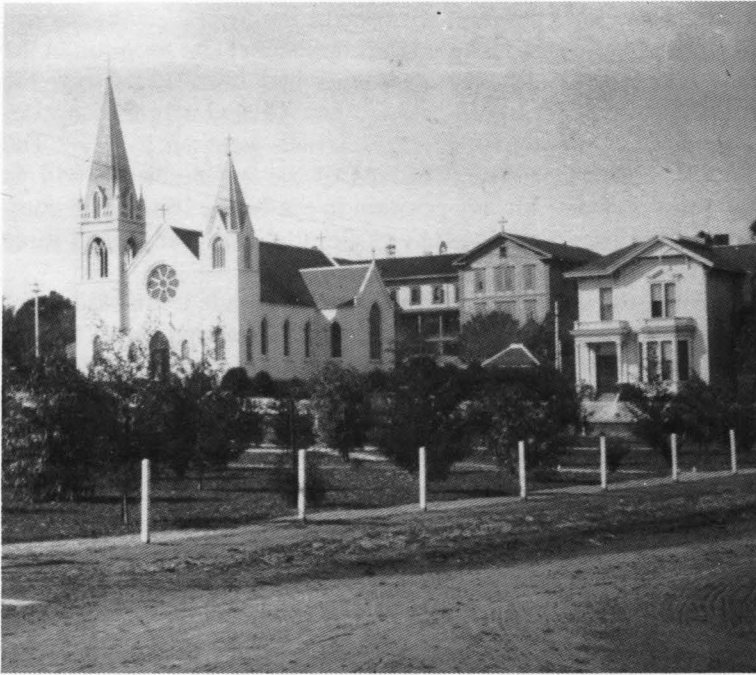
Many hearts are looking forward to the bright and happy day  
 When the fleet in all its glory will come sailing up the bay  
 Then will wave our glorious banner midst the cannons noisy din  
 O, I'd like to be in Frisco when the fleet comes in,  
 Yes, I'd like to be in Frisco when the fleet comes in.

Perhaps it was fortunate the sentimental girl was safely in the care of the good Sisters of Mercy miles from San Francisco Bay.

Many articles of happenings at the academy give the reader a feeling of the pace of life at the school. "A Visit to the Cannery" could well have been an assignment, but it tells something about the academy's daily routine—even to the four o'clock milk and cookies.

#### A Visit to the Cannery

Is there anything dearer to a school-girl's heart than a surprise — especially when it happens during class hours in the form of "an hour off" accompanied by a walk? We needed no second invitation to don our hats, and formed in line with more than usual alacrity when told that we were to visit the cannery, as the manager had very kindly extended an invitation to the Sisters and pupils to go through the building while



**St. Joseph's Church, showing St. Gertrude's in the background.**

the canning of asparagus was in progress. [Actually over ninety percent of the asparagus grown in California was grown in the delta.] On reaching the cannery we divided into groups, and following our kind guides, saw, and had explained to us, every stage in the process of asparagus canning. It was both interesting and instructive, our "hour off" being more of a lesson, perhaps, than it would have proved in the classroom.

The Rio Vista Cannery is one of the finest in California, making daily shipments to the metropolis and East. It is supplied by the Sacramento River islands which yield an abundance of the choicest asparagus grown in California.

Then we went for a walk along the bank of the peaceful Sacramento, watching the launches skim over its surface, and, now and then, a great mail boat steamed by. It was after five o'clock when we returned to the Convent to claim our usual four o'clock lunch, the afternoon having proved thoroughly enjoyable to all.

Titles of some of the literary contributions from the student authors include "Our State Flower," "A Favorite Saint," "The Diary of a Button," "Florence Nightingale," "Geraldine's Night Adventure." The column on Alumnae Notes revealed that a steady stream of former students visited the academy. Undoubtedly "2000 A.D." and "Is War Necessary?" revealed the serious concern of the older students.

The well-bound volumes and the consistent publications with photographs and graphics make these literary volumes similar to those from other secondary schools in the early years of the twentieth century.

In 1906 a great tragedy saddened all members of the academic community. When only a year old, a baby girl, Jennie McLaughlin had become a ward of the Sisters at St. Gertrude's. She had lived permanently at the academy as an "adopted daughter" and had become a favorite not only of the nuns but of all the students at the school. When sixteen, she became ill and within a week died. She had become so much a "daughter" of the Sisters that she was buried in the Sisters' private cemetery.

No other death affected the school as much as Jennie's until the founding Mother Superior, Mother Camillus, died in 1911. Her funeral was the largest ever held in Rio Vista with both the parochial and secular communities gathered to pay tribute to the woman educator primarily responsible for the well-known academy.

The school continued to flourish and with the growth of St. Joseph's the two communities sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy formed a very vital part of Rio Vista's life.

However, boarding schools proved to be a luxury in the late 1920s. Emphasis in education changed so that girls were required to have high school diplomas and many girls were expected to enter the world of work upon their graduation. Transportation to Rio Vista was not convenient and the Mother Superior, Sister Mary Josephine Campbell, who followed the legendary Mother Camillus was reputed to be anxious to close the rural academy. Mt. St. Carmel in Sausalito, also under the Sisters of Mercy, was more convenient to Bay Area families. Rural school districts were being consolidated and students were being bussed to large, efficient secondary schools. It seemed a number of factors contributed to the closing of the fifty-four year old academy that served so well the late Victorian generations. St. Gertrude's was closed in 1930 and its property turned over to St. Joseph's Military Academy. St. Joseph's, in turn, closed in 1932.

Joseph Bruning's gifts to his church and community are a part of history now, but they certainly enriched the life of those in Rio Vista who came under the influence of the Sisters of Mercy. Two of Mr. Bruning's daughters became members of the Sisters of Mercy.

Alumnae of St. Gertrude's last class recalled recently with touching nostalgia the privilege of attending the school with its firm academic requirements augmented by music, art, and drama.

"There was music everywhere—piano, choir, instruments."

"I can still hear Sister Germaine, beads chattering before her, when she would come down to check on the students in the practice room."

"Somehow, regardless of their habits, those Sisters could see and hear everything that went on."

"Every night there was homework. Everyone just expected to study at night—no such thing as study hall."

"We were supposed to pray more than we really did."

"We had good recesses! Marbles, jacks, hopscotch."

"I realize now that I was privileged to have had the opportunity to go to St. Gertrude's. I'm ever so grateful."



#### References:

1878 *The Gleaners Journal*. L.B. Palmer, Editor and Publisher, Rio Vista, CA, 1878.

*HillCrest*, St. Gertrude's Academy. Rio Vista, CA. Vol. 11, No. 3, June 15, 1908; Vol. III, June 15, 1909; Vol. IV, May 15, 1910; Vol. V, No. 2, December 15, 1911; Vol. VI, No. 1, June 15, 1912

Conversations with alumnae: Mrs. Braid Pezzaglia, Mrs. Tom Spivey, Mrs. Claude Byrne.

*River News*: June 13, 1903; June 26, 1903; June 17, 1904; August 12, 1904; March 17, 1905; March 16, 1906; March 23, 1906; June 22, 1906; Sept. 28, 1906; June 21, 1907.



## St. Joseph's Academy

The following account is nearly entirely based on an oral history taken from Sister Monica in September of this year and on material furnished by her. Aged ninety-five, she was a most gracious and capable subject exhibiting a truly photographic memory that she described as "a gift from God." Born in San Francisco, she entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1913. She was in charge of St. Joseph's in Rio Vista from August of 1924 until 1932. Between 1934 and 1966 she served as hospital administrator in Phoenix. She retired to Oakland and in 1970 moved to Burlingame where the interview was held.

St. Joseph's Academy came into existence in Rio Vista in 1903 because St. Gertrude's Academy was already flourishing in this small river village. It all happened in a wonderfully unplanned way. Among the teaching Sisters at St. Gertrude's was a San Francisco Sister of Mercy whose family suffered a great loss. The biological sister of this San Francisco nun died leaving three small boys. A petition to the Sisters at St. Gertrude's to undertake rearing the lads was refused because the school was an all-girls' boarding school, but the good Sisters felt they could take the lads at the old Bruning home which was used as a residence for some of the teachers. The home was not many blocks from the Academy so the members of the Order felt they could manage to make a home for the little boys. As soon as the parents of some of St. Gertrude's students learned that the Sisters were caring for little boys the requests came for the

Sisters to add the little brothers of several Academy girls. A boys' boarding school was formed. And on August 3, 1903, six little boys ensconced in the Joseph and Gertrude Bruning home became the first class of St. Joseph's Academy.

The word spread rapidly that a fine residence school for boys was flourishing in connection with St. Gertrude's Academy. Classes were conducted up the hill at St. Gertrude's where regular preparatory classes were held and boys from five to fourteen were welcomed. Not long after the school started additional buildings were constructed as St. Joseph's enrollment increased gradually.

Then in 1923 the good Sisters decided to change the school to a military academy similar to a military academy they operated in Los Angeles. The faculty then included as commandant a male instructor with an Army background. The following year Sister Monica arrived to be the administrator. There were sixty-five boarding students already enrolled for that year. In addition to a fine group of boys, the vivacious Sister found that the school also had chickens, turkeys, and a cow, all questionable surprises for the young San Francisco born nun who quickly adjusted to the responsibilities of running a boys' boarding school in a small delta town.

After examining her surroundings and getting to know her "family of boys," she began to devise ways of enriching the experiences of the children. When she first arrived she observed that a couple of the nuns supervised or watched the youngsters during their recreation hours—mainly

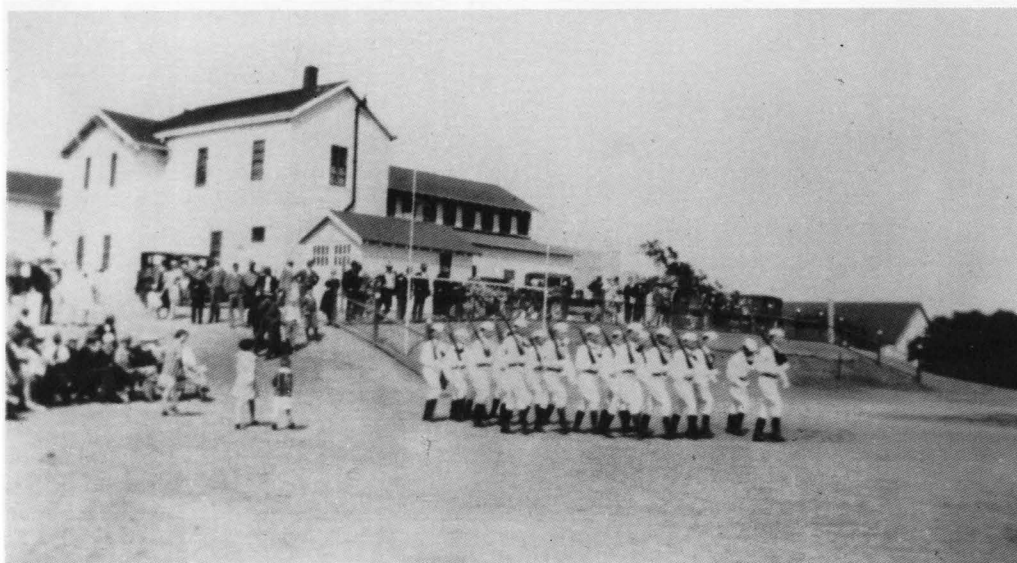


Sister Monaca, 1988

swimming in the Sacramento River. Realizing she was now responsible for all those little lives, she viewed the river as a dangerous ally. So her first chore—an outdoor swimming pool! There was plenty of land surrounding the old Bruning home and the school buildings so a space was set aside for a pool. Lots of boats went up and down the river and also many indigents or hoboes followed the river transportation. It didn't take these fellows a long time to learn that they could get a good free breakfast at the kitchen of the Academy even though they had to go out and dig in the big hole in the recreation area to earn it. Even the small boys needing some kind of busy work found themselves out digging "in the big hole." It wasn't long until Rio Vista merchants and friends joined the effort. One parent knew the president of a big cement company and suddenly there was all the cement needed for a pool 30 feet wide, 60 feet long, and from three to eight feet deep. And all this for a bit less than \$4,000. It proved to be a great center of activity for both young and older boys for years.

There was a beautiful sandy beach on the Sacramento River at St. Joseph's. The sand had been deposited on the bank during the dredging that had deepened the river. Here the boys dug "dugouts" in which they kept all their personal possessions such as cameras, baseballs and mitts and enjoyed a sense of privacy lacking in their dormitory living arrangements.

The first and second grade boys finished their classes up at St. Gertrude's Academy about two o'clock. They were escorted back to St. Joseph's by a couple of teaching nuns. As soon as they arrived they rushed upstairs to get out of their uniforms—khaki shirt and pants, puttees, and little black and orange beanies—and got into their swim suits. A cookie, a short prayer, and into the pool. When the older boys returned from school later in the afternoon, the same procedure was followed.



One of the four Companies in a practice drill on the academy grounds. The guns were made of wood. No real guns were allowed at the academy.

By the end of 1925, the boys had their swimming pool, tennis court, basketball court, and handball court. Discipline proved to be no great problem. Most boys were from middle class homes although there were several from wealthy homes, even from foreign countries. In a few cases tuition was reduced for youngsters where death or tragedy had changed the family circumstances. Occasional boys' pranks were easily managed by the nuns and the military officer.

The first two commandants hired were unsatisfactory in that their army training had not prepared them to understand such young students. But the third commandant Sister Monica hired, a young man of twenty-five with National Guard experience, was ideal. He was Alan Drady. He had excellent rapport with the boys and served for six years.

Sister Monica remembered that doughnuts were delivered every Saturday afternoon for Sunday morning breakfast. The delivery man carried them in on a huge tray the way waiters carry large trays. The older boys would sneak out from the hedges near the kitchen and relieve the tray of a few of its treasures, never disturbing the delivery man at all. After watching this for a couple of Saturdays, Sister Monica reported to the Captain that four boys had helped themselves to the doughnuts from the baker's tray. Nothing was said but on Sunday morning when doughnuts were passed out, Captain Drady quietly lifted the doughnuts from the culprits' plates, mentioning "I believe you had your doughnut yesterday."

Another incident revealing Captain



In 1986 St. Joseph's alumni and a few St. Gertrude's alumnae posed in front of the Rio Vista Museum with Sister Monaca.

Drady's effective handling of youngsters' exuberant behavior concerned the time several boys sneaked into the kitchen (the kitchen was off limits to all boys even though they were fond of the cook who fed them well.) Seeing a crate of eggs by the door, one lad could not resist stealing one egg. When outside he could think of nothing to do with a raw egg so he tossed it out on the hand ball court. When this was discovered, the boys were called together in drill formation by the Captain who asked, "Will the cadet who smashed the egg on the handball court please step out!" The guilty party obediently stepped out, saluted, and was told, "Clean it up. Company dismissed." Nothing else was said.

As the Academy developed the group decided it wanted some identity of its own so it was decided to make a coat of arms. The cadets designed a shield like the one used by the Knights of Mercy in the twelfth century, knights who went out to work with the slaves. On the shield in the center they placed a cross and behind the shield were crossed guns with the Latin motto of the school—Deo, patriae, scholae. Now identity was complete. Also a school flag was designed in black and gold silk. These banners accompanied school groups when they represented St. Joseph's in meets and competitions.

The tuition, including room and board, was only \$17.50 per month in 1924. By



Eleven stalwart academy football players.





# I

Battalion Parade .....1:30-1:40  
With field music; inspection by judging officers.

# II

Competitive Company Drill for "Captain" Trophy.....1:40-1:55

## ORDER OF APPEARANCE ON FLOOR:

Company "A"—Captain Jack Wood, commanding.

Company "B"—Captain Roger Rogers, commanding.

Company "C"—Captain Mario Asturias, commanding.

Company "D"—First Lieutenant Jack Crawford, commanding, is not competing, on account of size, but merely exhibiting.

This is a "three times" trophy. Previous winners: 1926, Company "B", Captain Frank Corbett; 1927, Company "B", Captain Gilbert Hansen; 1928, Company "C", Captain Mario Asturias.

# III

Concert—St. Joseph's Military Band.....1:55-2:05  
Mr. John P. Bedynek, Director.  
(Champions of Northern California, 1929.)

# IV

Individual Drilldown .....2:05-2:15

Senior Division, with arms.

Three medals, first, second and third places, are awarded. A cadet is eliminated as soon as he makes a mistake.

Previous title-holders: 1927, Captain Ted Newman; 1928, Major Francis Asturias.

# V

Field Music Ensemble.....2:15-2:20

Bugle calls and marches used at St. Joseph's Military Academy.

# VI

Competitive Physical Drill for "Bruning" Trophy.....2:20-2:35

## ORDER OF APPEARANCE ON FLOOR:

Company "C"—Captain Mario Asturias, commanding.

Company "B"—Captain Roger Rogers, commanding.

Company "A"—Captain Jack Wood, commanding.

Company "D"—First Lieutenant Jack Crawford, commanding.

Same conditions "Captain" Trophy. Previous winners: 1927, Company "A", Captain Norman Belden; 1928, Company "C", Captain Mario Asturias.



# VII

Individual Drilldown.....2:35-2:45

Junior Division, without arms.

This is known as an "O'Grady" drill—commands not to be obeyed unless "O'Grady" says so.

Previous titleholder: 1928, Sergeant Harry Gualco.

# VIII

Exhibition Drill—Competitive Platoon.....2:45-2:55

Major Francis Asturias, commanding.

This platoon represented St. Joseph's Military Academy in the Competitive Tournament of the Military Academies of Northern California, at the Presidio of San Francisco on last Saturday, May 4, and successfully defended its title as "Champion of Northern California" in the senior division. The junior platoon, commanded by Cadet Captain Roger Rogers, also won the first place trophy in its division.

# IX

Brass Quartet—Stephen Foster Melodies.....2:55-3:00

First Tenor—Francis Asturias, B-flat trumpet.

Second Tenor—Alphonse Coenen, E-flat alto.

Baritone—Valentine Valencia, B-flat baritone.

Basso—Roger Rogers, E-flat tuba

# X

Formal Guard Mount.....3:00-3:15

Officer of the Day.....Lieut. Clement Fisher

Adjutant .....Lieut. Jack Crawford

Commander of the Guard.....Lieut. Victor Denby

Sergeant-major .....Sergeant Russell King

N. C. O.'s of the Guard.....Sergeants John Jackson,

Francis Swall,

and Bob Shortreed.

Drum-major .....Musician Terray Heavey

# XI

Presentation of Trophies.....3:15-3:30

Rev. Arthur O'Connell, Pastor of St. Joseph's Church

Rio Vista, making presentation.

# RETREAT



## Program of Fifth Annual Presentation of Formal Drills and Exercises by the Cadets of St. Joseph's Military Academy, Mother's Day, May 12th, 1929

1929 it was \$450.00 for the ten-month term or \$45.00 a month. This fee also included laundry and ordinary repairs and mending of clothing. Quoting from the school's brochure:

"Such expenses as text books, stationery, medicines, shoe repairing, et cetera, are of course extras.

"An athletic fee of \$2.50 is billed the first of each semester.

"Music lessons may be had at the following rates:

Piano .....\$7.50

(two lessons and five practice periods)

Piano .....\$5.00

(one lesson and five practice periods)

Violin .....\$5.00

(one lesson and five practice periods)

Band instruments .....3.50

(one lesson, two supervised band

rehearsals and five practice periods

weekly)"

Even though the school seemed far from

the center of activity many interesting activities were planned for the cadets. Once a year Mr. Scott, a man in Rio Vista who owned barges, took the boys and the Sisters down the Sacramento River one whole day on a barge. The barge was so big that they could have lunch on it and the boys could romp and play.

Each year the boys participated in the Holy Ghost Parade sponsored by the Portuguese in Rio Vista; in addition the band also was once invited to play for the Knights of Columbus when in convention on Catalina Island. The remarkable Sister also recalled the encounter some boys had with Knute Rockne, famous football coach of Notre Dame. The Captain at St. Joseph's wrote to Rockne about the school and the boys' athletic program. He said he would like to give a prize to the four best football players on his team and thought it would be great if the boys could attend the talk Rockne gave to his players in the

locker room just prior to their taking the field against the UCLA team in Los Angeles. The famous Notre Dame coach not only responded favorably but also took the prize winners to luncheon at the Ambassador Hotel. Of course, the UCLA-Notre Dame football game was included.

Another time the same Captain Drady, who was a fine coach as well as instructor, contacted the famous Slip Madigan, football coach at St. Mary's, who managed to get the Christian Brothers to send a bus to Rio Vista for the boys. This included lunch and a big game at Moraga. Sister Monica and two of the teaching nuns accompanied the St. Joseph's boys on this outing.

Special treats like the above rounded out a balanced program of studies, physical education, and sports, and the study of religion.

The school was proud of its athletic program but its great emphasis was on the

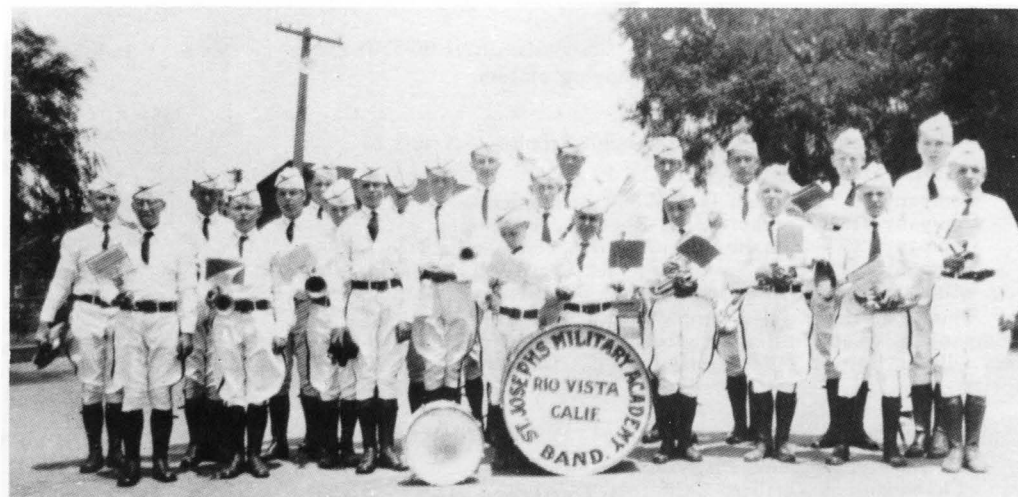
academic program. The combination of both programs plus the supervised life at boarding school underlay the aim, quoted from the academy catalogue, "Wherein Christian influences prevail, and where development of character is placed above all other considerations... The routine is fashioned to instill a thorough groundwork of religious, moral, intellectual and physical training so necessary in the formation of real character."

And it must have been successful for even now in 1988, at least thirty to thirty-five of those boys who were at the school the year it closed, 1932, meet on a day close to the Feast of St. Joseph with Sister Monica for a "family" day of reminiscing and feasting.

The school became well-known throughout Northern California due in part to the competitions and field days participated in with other military schools. The boys had a sports and physical education program, a military drill program, and a band, but no place to demonstrate their achievements. The band always played at the graduation programs for St. Gertrude but the boys never had an opportunity to show what they really could do. The sympathetic administrator understood their need to show their skills to friends and family so students and faculty together chose the second Sunday in May as the day to entertain their invited guests.

By 1928 the Mothers' Day program had become a very festive time in which each boy could participate. The school had a new silk flag and the Portuguese Society presented the cadets with a new silk American flag. Captain Dawes of the 250th Company Coast Artillery was the judge of the drills. In a letter to Captain Drady following his visit to St. Joseph's he wrote "You might tell your charges from me that I think they are a mighty fine lot. After liberal discount for the fact that they were at their best during my stay, I can say quite frankly that they impressed me as being the healthiest, cleanest, best mannered hundred boys I've had the pleasure of seeing. Their drilling is very well done and shows the right spirit, their physical exercises were well directed and nicely executed. The Cadet Officers have very fine command and are apparently well grounded in the rudiments of drill."

Also in 1928 thirty cadets accompanied by Captain Drady went to Palo Alto to compete with cadets from military schools from all Northern California. The well-trained Rio Vista boys took the First Trophy in both senior and junior competition and they were awarded two silver trophies. The U.S. Army judges commended the "cadets for their snap preci-



sion, soldierly bearing, for their splendid conduct, appearance, and for the command of their leader, Captain Francisco Asturias."

A year later the cadets competed at the Presidio parade grounds and again they won first place in senior and junior divisions; they were awarded four medals. The band entered competition also and won first place.

At the fifth Annual Presentation of Formal Drills and Exercises on Mothers' Day, 1929, over one thousand guests enjoyed the program.

In 1930 the boys again competed with all the military schools in Northern California and again carried off all the honors and by doing so gained permanent possession of two drill cups. The band proved its skill again by winning first place.

In addition to classes, military studies, and a full sports program, an occasional movie came their way. The local movie theater manager would call Sister Monica when he thought he had a movie that was suitable for the children. Then on Saturday morning he would run a special for them. Although the children would have been admitted free, the policy of the school was to train the boys to pay their own way, so each cadet paid five cents for admission. The school allowed the boys twenty-five cents a week spending money and maintained its own candy store where they could buy candy, but the five cents was given to them over and above this.

Although most youngsters were Catholic, the academy was open to non-Catholics. Again the principle of recognizing responsibility was expected of them and each cadet was expected to make an offering of ten or twenty-five cents, whatever the parents could afford. Each Friday one boy would go to the bank and get a roll of dimes and a roll of quarters;

and each Sunday the Captain of each battalion would go around to the boys that had no money so that all could drop money in the collection plate.

The talented Captain Alan Drady resigned in 1930 to spend his time as a full-time author. His first book was published that year, *Rodney Newton*. It was a boys' adventure story actually based on Drady's experience at St. Joseph's.

St. Joseph's was always self-supporting, even after the start of the great 1929 depression, in that its funding depended upon the Sisters of Mercy at the school, and while the Catholic Church sponsored the school, it did not provide financial support. When St. Gertrude's, which had been decreasing in enrollment, was closed in 1930, The Sisters of Mercy, who owned both schools, turned St. Gertrude's over to the junior division of St. Joseph's. Then in 1932 the Archbishop of San Francisco asked the Sisters to take over the Belmont School for Boys which was in the red due to the great 1929 depression. The Sisters closed St. Joseph's and moved to Belmont.

Sister Monica was proud of the fact that she was able to transfer \$4,000 to Belmont that she had been saving to buy a bus. The choice to save the Belmont School at the expense of St. Joseph's may be attributed to several factors. Transportation to and from Belmont was easier for most families. And the boys at Belmont on the whole came from more wealthy families than the boys at Rio Vista. Affluence has influence.

Today few traces of the two schools remain in Rio Vista. St. Gertrudes, St. Joseph and Bruning are memorialized as street names. The Rio Vista Museum contains a number of pictures, publications, documents, and artifacts of the schools. But strong and fond memories of the schools persist in the minds of its former students and administrator.



# Reflections from the Past

by Sumi Okahara

*The following is the speech Mrs. Okahara delivered at Pioneer Day at Rockville Church this year. It was so effective we present it in its entirety.*

Since I am not a native of Solano County but of Alameda County, when I was asked to speak about the contributions of persons of Japanese ancestry to Solano County, I was somewhat hesitant. However, I have talked to a number of Solano County native Niseis as well as a number of Isseis who lived in this county about eighty years ago, and have read over thirty books, written by Niseis and Caucasian sociologists, historians, and others and have come to the conclusion that the contribution of the Isseis, regardless of where they lived, has been very much the same.

Before I go on, I'd like to explain to you the terms I shall be using. Issei are the immigrant generation, those people like my parents, and my parents-in-law. According to the 1910 census, my father-in-law, Choichi Okahara, came to Solano County in 1906. The Nisei are the people like my husband and me, born in the U.S. who are therefore U.S. citizens. The Sansei are the children of the Nisei, like our daughters. Yonsei are the grandchildren of the Nisei.

Mr. Bert Hughes very kindly went through the 1900 census and wrote down all the names of the Japanese living in Solano County in 1900. According to this list there were 570 Japanese immigrants in Solano County. The majority of these people were farm laborers, although there were 1 minister, 2 farmers, 3 storekeepers, 2 boardinghouse keepers, 1 manufacturer, 2 dressmakers, and 16 seamen. The average age of these people was 23, with a range from 1 to 43 years of age. The Japanese immigrants were smaller of stature, had difficulty learning the language because even the alphabet was completely different. Many of these immigrants were third and fourth sons of poor farmers of southern Honshu. Most had to support themselves from the instant they arrived. Many of these immigrants were sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen, knew no English, were poor and came from a completely different culture. To add to the difficulty for their learning English, there were sounds in English such as *r* and *l*, in words like *curl*, which they could never learn to say. Another sound that does not exist in Japanese is *th* such as in *this* or in *thin*. Even the books were opened backwards according to the Issei. The Japanese say "east-north" and "west-south" instead of "north-east" and "south-west."

The Japanese say "four or three" instead of "three or four."

According to the 1910 census there were 188 Isseis in Vallejo, Green Valley Township, Suisun Township, and Vacaville Township. By this time there were now seven women and eleven children; of these nine were born in California. Many of the men had learned to speak English. There were now at Mare Island twenty-nine Isseis of whom one was a female nurse who had arrived in 1905. There was one machinist mate, one steward, and others were servants and cooks.

In the Green Valley and Suisun Townships there were now fourteen farmers, two boarding-house keepers, a fish peddler, a retailer of notions, a bank janitor, two wood choppers, and others were cooks and farm laborers. The average age was 31.8 years.

In the Vacaville Township there were now fifty-nine persons of Japanese ancestry. Of these, seven were wives, eleven children, nine of these Niseis and therefore citizens of U.S.A. The Isseis men's average age was 39.4 years, the wives', 25, and the children ranged in age from one month to sixteen years old. The two children born in Japan were a girl of sixteen and a boy of five. The Niseis ranged from one month to four years of age.

Regardless of the educational background of the Isseis or social backgrounds, it seems that all Isseis passed on to us Niseis certain philosophical beliefs which influenced what the Niseis were able to do in spite of racial prejudice, discrimination, and legal obstacles put in our ways.

The Isseis lived and modeled for the Niseis the concepts of *Gaman*, *Ganbatte*, *Giri*, *Ninjo*, and *Haji*. Above everything else the Isseis emphasized the importance of education and respect for elders, regardless of their educational background or status in life.

*Gaman* means to persevere, to endure the unendurable. *Ganbatte* means in present day vernacular "Hang tough." *Giri* is a difficult term to translate but the nearest English equivalent might be obligation. *Ninjo* might possibly be interpreted as humanity or empathy; it means to feel warmth towards fellow humans. *Haji*

means shame. Most of us were told almost daily before we left for school, "Don't do anything to bring *Haji* upon our family, our group or the Japanese."

There was a time when I was in elementary school, about sixty years ago, when America was supposed to become a great big melting pot — when regardless of cultural backgrounds we were supposed to assimilate and become of one cultural background, although no one knew what that American culture was.

Prior to World War II there were a number of Niseis who were Stanford or UC grads, who although they had a Bachelor's in engineering or education, could not get a job in their chosen fields and were raising strawberries or vegetables. In 1939 when I graduated from Washington Union High School in Centerville (now Fremont), this is what happened to me. I shall read for you an article I wrote as a member of the Bay Area Writing Project, which was put in a UC publication.

## Go Be a Waitress

"Don't bother to register here for a secretarial course; we couldn't ever get a job for you. Go across the street to the Central Trade School and become a waitress," Miss Dolan spit out at me. What's she trying to do to me, this "old hag" I kept thinking. Look at her turning her back on me, pretending to be busy, that short, fat, old woman. O.K. if she won't register me, I'll go on to the next person down the registration table. I had no idea that Miss Dolan was actually trying to shield me from being her thirty-second, well-trained, disappointed Nisei student.

In spite of being a naive, over-protected, and somewhat bashful country girl, I blurted out in a shaky voice, "Miss Dolan, isn't this a tax-supported school? As long as I qualify you are obliged to educate me. Besides, I'm not asking you for a job." Having been told for the past seventeen years that I had to be twice as good as the white students in order to get anywhere, I was confident that if I could be the "best" I'd be able to get my own job. The second woman signed me up for the classes. One of my classes was Duplicating Machines, usually reserved for second-year students, with Miss Dolan as instructor.

I was very careful about every piece of work I handed in, especially, in Miss Dolan's class. I never handed in anything that was not perfect in my eyes. Two months later Miss Dolan asked, "Miss Ohio, do you want to be my assistant?" (She never could pronounce my

**name, Sumi Ohye,/O-o-e/. She had told me on the second day in her class, "You'll be Miss Ohio while you're in my class.)" So, she really thinks I can be more than a waitress, I thought.. "No, thank you. I have no intentions of being your assistant," I replied haughtily.**

What a rash statement to make in those days when not one Nisei woman had been successful in getting a good secretarial job except for those jobs that were in Japanese firms.

As I continued at the school, I took every civil service examination I could — federal, state, and county. I did well enough on the tests to get the highest possible scores and was one of two girls hired at the Fresno Army Air Base. My girl friend and I were the first two Nisei women to be hired on any American military installation as secretaries, not as waitresses. I was, therefore, in Fresno from July through August of 1941. In mid-August my girl-friend and I both received dismissal notices, "for lack of technical experience," which I was unable to understand. I went to my boss, a captain and asked him why, his reply was "orders from above." I asked his superior, a lieutenant colonel, with the same result; and I went to see the colonel who commanded the Base and was given the same answer. I asked the colonel, "From whom do you get your orders?" and was told the President of the United States. I did not have the resources or energy to pursue this matter any further so I went home. After that I went to work for the Federal-State Market News Service, Dept. of Agriculture, State Office Bldg. #2, Sacramento.

Soon thereafter Pearl Harbor was bombed. On December 8, 1941, I went to work as usual and there were two bayonet-carrying soldiers standing guard, who stopped me and said I'd have to have someone vouch for me that I was employed in that building or I would not be allowed to go into the building. Mr. George K. York, head of the department, was called and he immediately vouched for me so I was allowed to go in the building to do my work. The weeks that followed December 7, 1941, became a nightmare for Japanese Americans. Fathers who were community leaders, Japanese newspaper editors and publishers, businessmen, Japanese language teachers, and religious leaders were rounded up by the F.B.I. and put in jails. Families did not know where their fathers were taken or how long they would be gone. For these families this time was a nightmare of fear and wondering.

Meanwhile, children went to school, fearful that they would be called names and

be mistreated because most people still thought of us as Japanese rather than American. We were afraid to face our white friends. Some children wanted to stay home, but our parents urged us to go to school. Education was very important to the Niseis even at a time like this.

Teachers tried to help by telling students to be kind to their Japanese American classmates. Despite this, the Nisei students still wondered if white Americans would remain their friends. Some did even though it was not popular and they got called "Japan lovers." Despite the ridicule and mistreatment, the Nisei still felt a strong loyalty to the United States. As one boy said, "Loyalty of the Caucasians always gave me the courage to go on."

The loss of many fathers made everyday life for families difficult. A curfew and a five-mile travel limit kept Japanese Americans restricted to areas close to their homes. Families were required to turn in shortwave radios, cameras, binoculars, and firearms to the local police. Older brothers and sisters returned from colleges and universities to be with their families and to help care for family businesses.

The Isseis were proud people. They had worked hard all their lives and obeyed the laws of this country. It was a terrible thing for them to be afraid. It was difficult and cruel for them and their children to be judged because of the way they looked.

In some rural communities, vigilantes terrorized Japanese American families. There were shootings, and even killings. Anti-Japanese groups used the isolated vigilante attacks as an excuse for demanding that all Japanese Americans be put into detention centers. This was like saying, "Put them all into detention centers so that they will be safe from criminals."

Newspapers, magazines, and politicians fanned the fear and hateful feelings towards Japanese. They said, "Send the Japs away and don't let them come back!" Some even said that all the people of Japanese ancestry should be sent back to Japan. Niseis who were born in the United States and had never been to Japan wondered how anyone could be sent back to a place where they had never been. Where were they to go?

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which gave the Secretary of Defense the authority to select zones where "any and all persons of Japanese ancestry" would be excluded. Although the United States was also at war with Germany and Italy, this order did not affect German and Italian families.

On February 20, 1942, Secretary of Defense Henry L. Stimson carried out the

President's executive order. Approximately 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, were ordered to leave their homes on the West Coast. Japanese Americans were never accused of any crime nor were they given a chance to prove their innocence. Even the Supreme Court, the highest court in the country, did not protect Japanese Americans. No other group of people (except the Native Americans) in the history of the United States had been forcefully removed from their homes.

The Niseis, who had lived all their lives in this country, could not believe they were being evacuated from their homes. They wondered about freedom and justice. What happened to the promises of the Pledge of Allegiance and the Constitution?

Families had no idea when they would be given notice to move. Everyday they looked for evacuation orders to appear on telephone poles and on sides of buildings. Everyone was anxious and nervous. They made no preparations because they all hoped to be spared.

When the orders appeared, there was very little time to prepare, often as little as two weeks. Then everything that they owned had to be taken care of—land, homes, furniture, tools, and equipment. There was a frenzy of activity. Many took advantage of the Isseis and Niseis by buying their belongings for next to nothing.

Each family member was given an identification tag with a number on it. Smallpox and typhoid shots were administered to prevent an outbreak of epidemics.

Packing was the hardest part. Evacuation instructions stated that each person could only take what he or she could carry. This included bedding, linen, clothing, dishes, and eating utensils. Some people threw out things they should have kept, and packed things they should have left behind. Everyone was bewildered and confused.

When the day finally came to depart, everyone was taken to assembly centers on buses escorted by soldiers. It was a heart-breaking experience. Some not only left their homes and friends, but also their family pets. Many tears were shed as people sadly left their homes behind. Japanese Americans were put into assembly centers at nearby fairgrounds and race tracks because permanent camps were not yet ready. The people of this area were sent to the Turlock Fair grounds and from there to Gila in Arizona.

After a few months in assembly centers we were sent to relocation centers. For those of you who wish to know what life was like in the assembly centers and relocation centers I recommend that you look through some of the books I have



gathered here. Except for the books marked with my name the others are all available in our public libraries throughout the county.

I recommend the following books: *Beyond Words* is rich in photographs. *Citizen 13660* is a book which presents the Topaz experience in cartoon fashion, with short explanations. (Topaz was a War Relocation Authority Center very much like the other WRA centers.) Dillon Meyer's *Uprooted Americans* has quite a number of photos, too. It is written by the second director of W.R.A. *Go for Broke* is a pictorial record of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most decorated troop in American history. *Yankee Samurai* is a story of the Military Intelligence Service soldiers. *Japanese-American Journey* has a number of photos, too.

I shall not dwell on the evacuation as there have been so many TV programs covering it since President Reagan signed the Redress Bill on August 10th.

Remember, that at the beginning I told you that the majority of the Isseis were farm laborers; now let me show you what the Issei philosophy and emphasis on education did for the descendants of the Isseis.

Amongst our friends there are many Niseis who were born in Solano County, just as my husband was. We keep in touch with many of them through our annual Christmas card exchange. Therefore I looked over my Christmas card list and came up with the following list of occupations held by the descendants of Solano County Isseis.

Vice-consul to Indonesia(now retired), vice-mayor of Fairfield, several medical doctors, several attorneys, a few professors, many teachers, social agency executives, several scientists, bank manager, nurses, vice president of a national corporation, audiologist, state district attorney, dentists, civil service workers in administrative positions, pearl dealer, restaurateurs, florists, movie actor, several engineers, four pharmacists, minister's wife, several wholesale nursery owners, real estate agents, insurance agents, many accountants, even an IRS inspector, some farmers(large scale), and some farm managers. Many of these people are veterans of 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and some veterans of MIS.

Now I'd like to read for you a poem I wrote in summer 1981 which is also in a UCB publication.

**Reflections on the Past**  
When I arrive at the portals of those  
Pearly Gates,

If St. Peter should ask me, "Which Way?"

Wonder what I should answer,  
"Wherever I'll find the most  
friends,"...perhaps?

If there is a Pearly Gate, how many  
ways will it lead?

Will it lead to Heaven where I might  
meet Mrs. Inouye?

That gracious, Issei, Quaker, matron of  
the Philadelphia Friends' Hostel?

Did the Emperor's Medal of Apprecia-  
tion influence which way she went?

Where is Mr. Ponte, that octogenarian  
neighbor, who watched the plants  
grow inch by inch?

Every Sunday morning, our greetings  
were the same.

"You're working again on Sunday.  
You'll surely go to hell."

"Oh, ya? Well...I'll see you there."

Will I find Grammy Brooks, who  
although a Doctor of Theology,  
Never would allow us to call her  
Professor.

She asked our daughter, then age 3, "Do  
you go to Sunday School?"

To which she replied promptly, "Yes,  
I do. I go to the 'Mess-of-a' Church."

Did Mrs. T.G. Frothingham, descen-  
dant of the first governor of the Com-  
monwealth of Massachusetts go to a  
special place?

Set aside for only the "Blue-bloods of  
Heaven"?

Who at first disapproved of Sumi, a  
member of her household, associating  
with Gertrude,

Since "Miss Gertrude King is not in the  
'Blue Book of Boston Society',"

But finally tolerated Trudy's visits to  
Sumi,

Since after all Trudy was the daughter  
of the retired Amherst College  
president.

Wonder which way Miss Gertrude King  
went,

She who wrote the briefest letters:  
"Dear Sumi,

Are you dead or alive? Love, Trudy."

She who had two mink coats while at-  
tending graduate school,

Who told me in no uncertain terms,  
"You're prejudiced, against the  
rich."

Will I find Dr. Thurber, that rotund,  
Black, Unitarian minister, who said,  
"You social workers are the weirdest  
bunch of people,

You act like Christians, but I never see  
any of you in church."

Hope he went to Heaven, as I hope An-  
nie Clo Watson has too.

There were no funeral services for An-  
nie Clo Watson, that white-haired,  
gentle, Southern-bred, soft-spoken  
lady,

Who ran the International Institute  
more efficiently than any efficiency  
expert could have.

Yet, no matter whether day or night, if  
anyone was in need, she was surely  
there.

Dr. Thurber and Annie Clo have got to  
be together, for they can't possibly be  
finished solving all the problems of  
the world.

Is there a special place for mothers-in-  
law, such as mine,

Who felt so strongly that men should not  
even be found in the kitchen?

And as of now, while I struggle with this  
free verse,

Her son is scrubbing the bathroom floor  
which needed it so badly.

Does Earl Warren remember that I  
babysat his kids during his mother's  
funeral?

He trusted me with his children,  
As he trusted many other Niseis to whom  
he gave his house keys,  
But alas! He made little effort to halt the  
evacuation.

But most of all I wonder where General  
DeWitt went,

Who said, "Japs are Japs, and they  
reproduce like rats."

Wonder what his daughter thinks, who  
is now a teacher

When she must teach the history of  
World War II to Sansei kids.

I know that some day I'll learn,  
Whether Annie Clo, Grammy Brooks,  
Trudy or Mr. Ponte were right.

Most likely there are no absolute  
answers,

Only those that satisfy me...for now.

As a people, the Isseis and Niseis were  
confronted with a challenge few are ever  
compelled to endure, and the response by  
any standard was magnificent. Few others  
would have endured as much and kept the  
faith. Mike Masaoka, who was the ex-  
ecutive secretary of the JACL during the  
crucial war years, wrote the following  
Japanese-American Creed prior to the  
JACL biennial convention which was held  
on Labor Day weekend 1940.

### The Japanese-American Creed

I am proud that I am an American citizen of Japanese ancestry, for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this nation. I believe in her institutions, ideals, and traditions; I glory in her heritage; I boast of her history; I trust in her future. She has granted me liberties and opportunities such as no individual enjoys in this world today. She has given me an education befitting kings. She has entrusted me with the responsibilities of the franchise. She has permitted me to build a home, to earn a livelihood, to worship, think, speak, and act as I please—as a free man equal to every other man.

Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never be bitter or lose faith, for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of the American people. True, I shall do in my power to discourage such practices, but I shall do it in the American way: aboveboard, in the open, through courts of law, by education, by proving myself to be worthy of equal treatment and consideration. I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics.

Because I believe in America, and I trust she believes in me, and because I have received innumerable benefits from her, I pledge myself to do honor to her at all times and in all places; to support her Constitution; to obey her laws; to respect her flag; to defend her against all enemies, foreign or domestic; to actively assume my duties and obligations as a citizen, cheerfully and without reservations whatsoever, in the hope that I may become a better American in a greater America.

Forty-eight years later, my wish for the U.S.A. is essentially the same, except that I would add to the above that "I believe in an America that can be a strong influence in bringing about world peace." The history of America gives abundant proof that the people of America, coming from many countries of the world, and speaking many different languages, can work together towards a powerful nation which can work towards peace of the world. I pray that all of us can play some small part in bringing about a peaceful world, led by a strong prosperous nation comprised of people whose ancestors came from the four corners of the world.



This recent picture of the back of Stonedene shows where eucalyptus trees have been removed by developers. The right side facing toward Suisun Valley Road ceased being the front when the additions were built on in 1929.



Aerial view of Stonedene taken just before developers came in shows its orientation with respect to Suisun Valley Road. Many of the eucalyptus trees on the left were partially destroyed by fire three years ago.



## From There to Here—The Evolution of a House

Time has seldom dealt kindly with our material possessions and this is so true with homes built in the early west. Few houses have lived for more than a century and most deteriorated and were abandoned or destroyed long before that. One that did last, however, is the sandstone Victorian ranch home called Stonedene, situated in the heart of Suisun Valley. Its existence has been threatened several times but it has survived the usual tragedies that haunt rural homes—fire and severe neglect. Now more secure and beautiful than it has ever been since it was built in 1861, it promises to become an island of Victorian Gothic splendor in the midst of a rapidly encroaching residential development that is the epitome of 1980 affluence.

Three great and fortunate circumstances happened to this fine old stone house—it

stayed in the founding same family for one hundred and three years, it was given to Julia Morgan, California's first great woman architect, to renovate in 1929, and it was purchased by Dr. and Mrs. Don Curry forty-five years later in 1974 when again it needed a careful uplift.

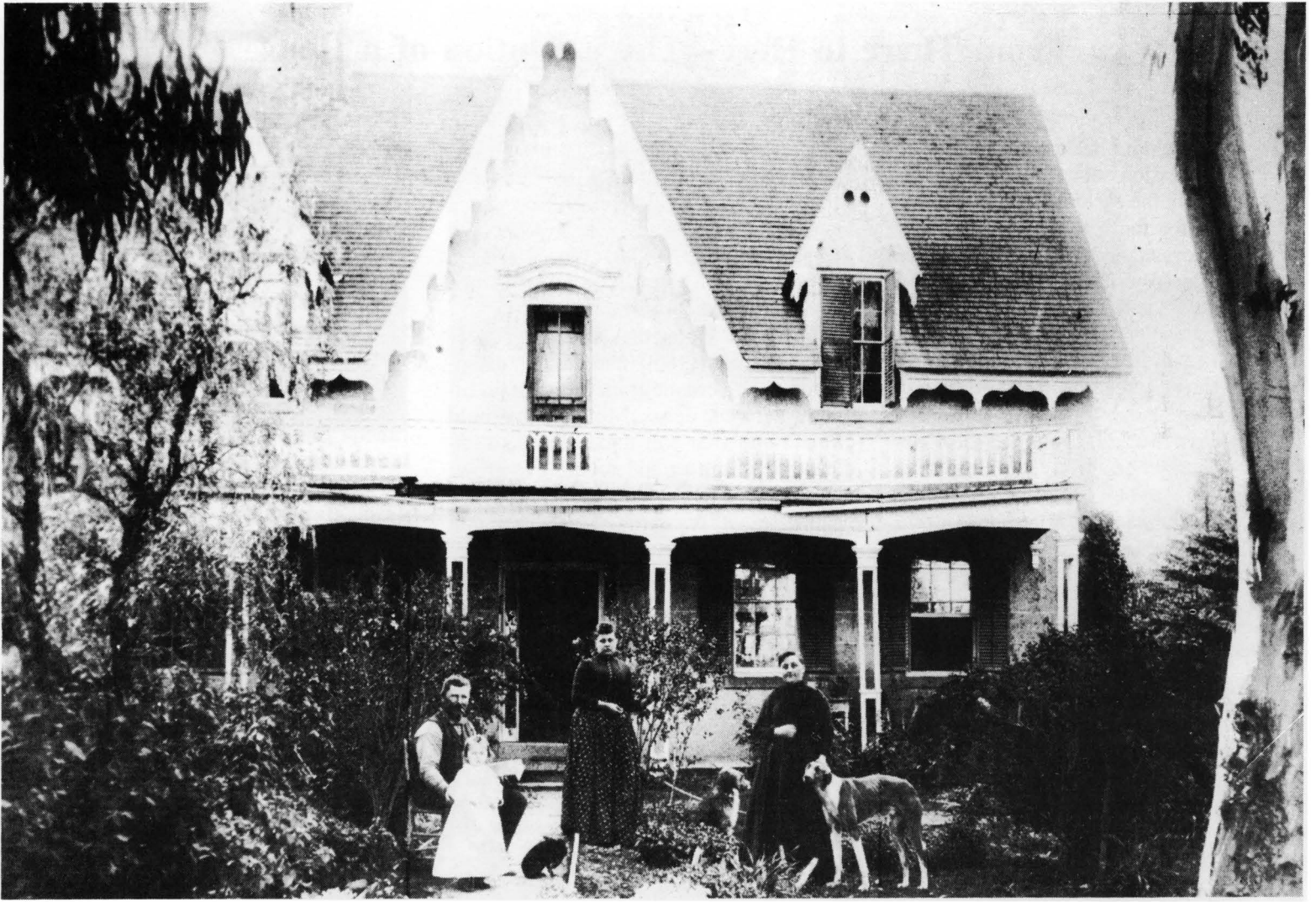
The Suisun Valley that attracted pioneer Sam Martin in 1850 has almost disappeared. The verdant grain fields of an Indian overseer, Jesus Molino, the mild climate and rich soil that seemed to encourage everything and anything to grow, and the cool breezes that rustled the heavy headed grain encouraged the emigrant from Pennsylvania to seek adjoining property. In 1853 he became the first white settler to record a legal purchase of this land. He remained on friendly terms with Molino, who worked for Archibald Ritchie



and with Chief Solano, head of the Suisun tribe, who had his "wickiup" near Martin's home. He, Martin, appears to have paid \$3,000 for approximately two hundred acres of land that he worked con-



A picture of Stonedene after the Morgan renovation showing the solarium at the left and the clean facade that formerly held the veranda with all its ornamentation. Note the slate shingle design.



**This early picture of Stonedene and Martin family members shows the original porch and shutters which were later removed because of deterioration.**

tinuously for over thirty-five years and then passed on to one of his sons.

The often told story of Martin's move to California, similar to that of so many early settlers, reminds us of the pioneer's constant search for the perfect spot. After leaving his native Pennsylvania, young Martin moved to Indiana, then to Kentucky, on to Missouri, and finally at thirty-six with a wife and four children he heeded the call to California gold mines. His stop here was the Feather River country where he must have been fairly successful. He was, however, a farmer at heart, not a miner and soon was on the move again. As he traveled to the west from the mines, Suisun Valley appeared to answer his desires and he settled in for the rest of his life.

History tells us that ten years after he first settled near his Indian friend, Molino, he undertook the arduous task of returning to St. Joseph, Missouri, where he purchased 660 cattle which he then drove back to California, arriving with the whole herd virtually intact. This almost superhuman feat appears to be the source of his finances that permitted him to build an unusual, per-

manent home from native sandstone and to become a resourceful and significant leader of his community.

Few settlers used native stone for their homes although lumber was not plentiful nor were many Easterners adept at making adobe blocks. Martin sought the help of a German architect and German stonecutters who obtained native sandstone from nearby quarries, probably Cordelia.

Chinese immigrants were used as laborers in building the house and in constructing the five-hundred foot wall that still today fronts the property. Because the house rests on bedrock, it has not "settled" as most houses not so fortunately situated.

The architectural style chosen by Martin is referred to as Gothic Revival or American Gothic. Many Victorians had become enchanted with Gothic literature and romantic tales, incorporating or borrowing as much as they could from medieval cathedrals and stone edifices into their homes, especially in the 1850s and 1860s. To save expense they substituted wooden gingerbread for the stone tracery

they admired so much in European counterparts. With the exterior of the house conforming to the fashion of the times, the inside was likewise typical Victorian. The rooms were small and thirteen in number with high ceilings. Wall paper was used throughout.

The original Sam Martin family consisted of parents and five children and various relatives. The elder Martin died in 1885, but before his death he carefully divided his property among his children so there would be no wrangling over his estate. The original home and immediate property were bequeathed to his son Henry who was born in Missouri a year before the family migrated to California. Henry married Carrie Pittman of San Francisco and moved for awhile to Cordelia where the couple managed the Cordelia Hotel and reared their family. The couple had two children, S.H. Martin and Mae Martin. It was this grandson S.H. Martin who decided to remodel the home sixty-eight years after it was built.

Because of an association at the University of California where he majored in



engineering, young Martin was able to interest Julia Morgan, already busy with work on William Hearst's San Simeon castle, in designing the remodeling. Morgan doubled the size of the house but stayed within the province of the Gothic Revival architectural parameters by adding a wing that duplicated the fundamentals of the original house. Using the same kind of local sandstone and copying from the original, the steep roof pattern and triple dormers, Morgan blended into one the old and the new. By changing the length of the windows so they become French windows that opened vertically rather than horizontally the architect dignified both the interior and exterior of the building.

In the American Gothic tradition "wings could be sent out in any direction and these in turn when connected by porches and verandas achieve a desired unity." Thus Julia Morgan's remodeling of Stonedene was an architecturally acceptable addition.

The modest and characterful "wooden gingerbread" was retained but a beautiful gray slate roof replaced the original shingles, subtly giving the enlarged structure an English character.

The solarium added on the east side of the house by Morgan in addition to the rear wing relates well to the rest of the structure because of the same sandstone and the wooden trim painted the same shade as the early Victorian trim.

As mentioned, the original house consisted of many small rooms but this interior was changed by Morgan who enlarged the parlor, added heavy beams on the ceiling and a massive red fireplace made of native stone. A touch of elegance added was the curved or rolled ceilings in the dining room and several other rooms. Gone was the Victorian wallpaper and instead stippling adorned the walls. The view from the parlor down the center first floor hall reveals a number of pleasant archways, a pattern also followed in several rooms.

The grounds retained a relaxed rural feel with old eucalyptus trees, oaks, pine and fir trees giving shade and privacy. An old Indian milling stone in the rear yard and an old spring, once important to the native Suisuns, remain undisturbed.

The original veranda, by then sagging and deteriorated, was removed as also were the ornamental shutters. Morgan changed the front entrance so it no longer faced Suisun Valley Road, but was on the north side where the new and old wings joined together.

The hand-hewn stone retaining wall that outlines the five hundred foot frontage on Suisun Valley Road remains much as it was when first constructed in 1861, as do the two eight foot high stone pillars that

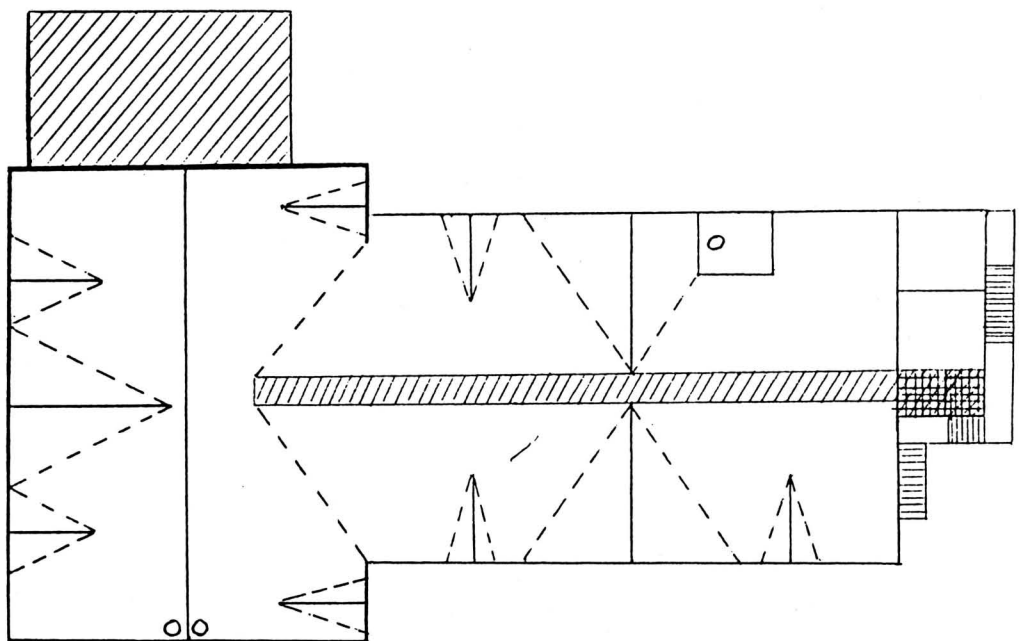


An unusual shot of the Victorian gables and the characteristic "gingerbread." Wrought iron balconies were added later.

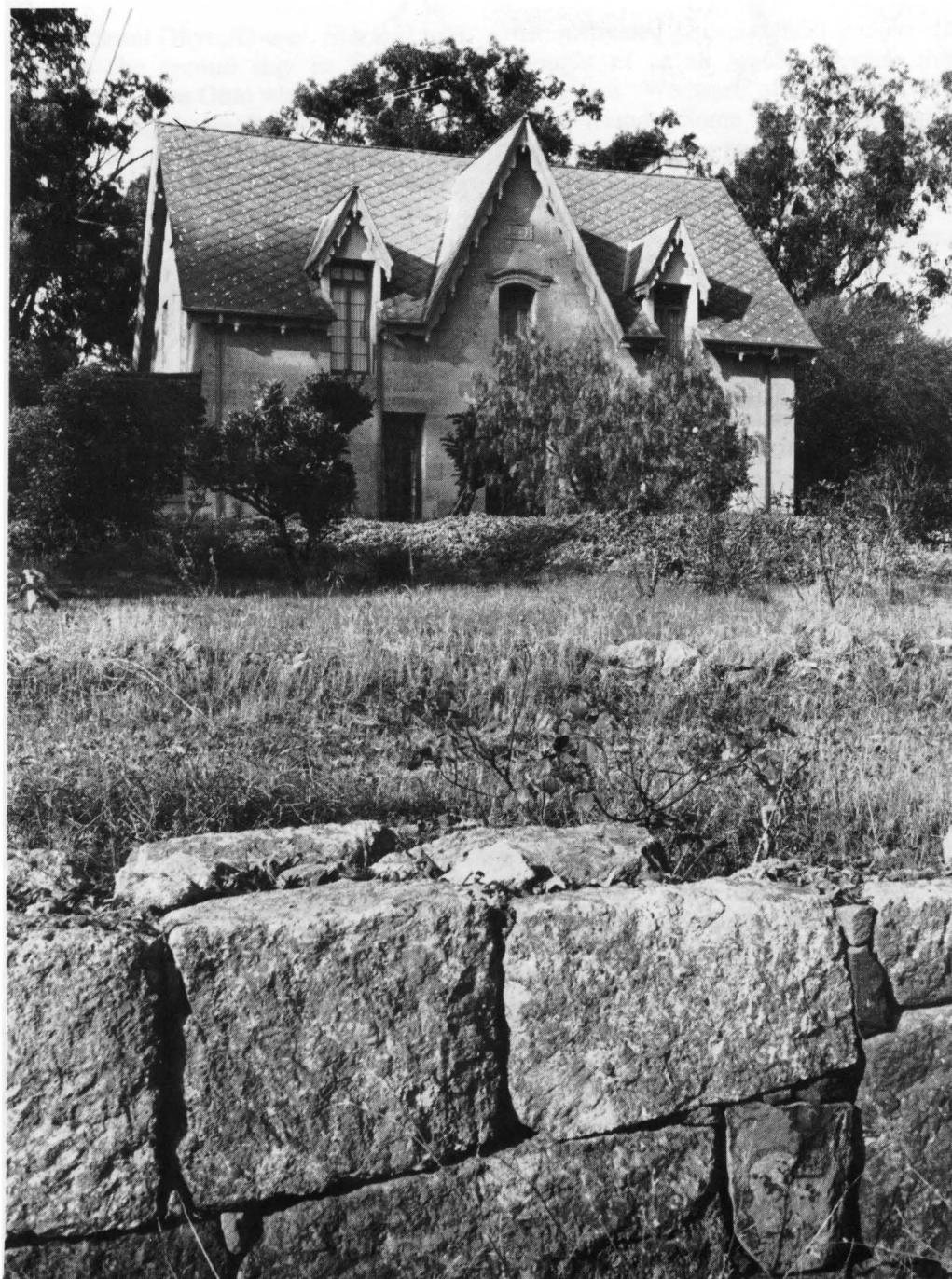
mark the entrance.

After Morgan's interesting and significant renovation the house was occupied by two more generations of the Martin family. The spacious rooms were made into two independent living-quarters, one upstairs and one on the main floor. Then

in the mid-sixties a major portion of the Martin land was sold to accommodate Solano Community College. A few years later all but three and one-half acres had been sold to developers. Finally, this last part was sold to a real estate dealer who used Stonedene as his office for a few



Roof plan of Stonedene shows the original 1861 building on the left. The upper left shaded area is the Morgan solarium. The horizontal shaded area is the walkway on roof of the Morgan wing.



This photograph taken from Suisun Valley Road before Stonedene's last renovation emphasizes the fine old stone retaining wall put in by Chinese laborers in 1861.

months in 1973 just prior to selling it to the Currys.

By this time the house had aged into a "fixer-upper," and was badly in need of repair and attention. The Currys found their first years in the house an unending period of reconstruction, while coping with numerous professional and family responsibilities. Dr. Curry was commuting to his office in the University of California at Davis and Mrs. Curry was raising small children while involved as an art dealer in her activities of collecting and selling paintings and other fine art works.

Among the improvements made by the Currys is the interior painting which em-

phasizes the archways, high rolled ceilings, deep-set windows, and individual room decor. Two years ago nearby eucalyptus trees were ignited by a grass fire that for awhile threatened Stonedene and though the house was saved windows were broken from the heat, paint blistered, and heavy damage by smoke throughout necessitated the entire interior to be freshly refinished.

The stately rooms have been decorated by Mrs. Curry with fine examples of early American and European paintings, bronze sculptures, porcelains, ivory, with furniture appropriate to the size and dignity of the rooms.

The Currys have added simple but appropriate wrought iron balconies on the second story windows. Actually these balconies serve as a kind of fire escape and safety feature, but their appearance adds to the dignity of the exterior while concealing their utilitarian purpose. A wrought iron gate with a pattern matching that of the balconies hangs on the massive stone pillars that signal the driveway.

The treatment of all the windows on the exterior is finished in the same way so there is a dignified and consistent style to the appearance of the house.

The great change facing Stonedene does not come from architects, decorators, age, or deterioration. The great change is the setting. Once this isolated farm house, one of the first in the valley, sat among grain fields, orchards, and vineyards. Now it is sitting among suburban homes with their suburban sized lots. Gone are most of the tall trees, the isolation, the luxuriant grains, fruits, nuts, and grapes. However, three acres still surround the house and its carriage house, a Morgan addition that duplicates the style of the home even to the great slate roof and the triple dormers.

When in the 1880s the Sam Martin family congregated around the table in the gathering twilight of a late fall day, the only sounds were those of a dog warning off an inquisitive rabbit or the lowing of the family milk cow in a nearby barn.

When the Curry family gathers around the table for an evening meal in the cathedral ceiling dining room, the dog may be warning a visiting raccoon, but instead of a friendly bovine greeting one might hear the purr of a Mercedes or BMW as it slips up the manicured road to the commuters' welcoming garage.

The world has changed outside Stonedene's solid walls and the venerable house has been modified from functional farmhouse to delightful country manor, but through the thoughtful and enlightened efforts of its owners the look, the feel, and the essence of a fine house remains,—the grand dame of Suisun Valley houses is still "at home" and deserves its listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

And in mid-October a totally new experience came to Stonedene. A Hollywood movie company found the unusual dimensions of the house and grounds the perfect setting for a horror movie. When the magic of the camera addresses the magic of the one hundred twenty-seven year old house, a spectacular tale just may emerge.





# Blue Mountain Joint School

## The Story of a Rural One Room School

By M. Clyde Low

### Discovery of a Landmark

Research on pioneer routes from Solano County to neighboring counties revealed the presence on old maps of early and now vanished country school houses in the mountain areas of the county. Marked on the boundary with Napa County were two sites: that of the Mountain Joint School behind Twin Sisters Mountain on the old wagon route from Napa City to Suisun and Gordon Valleys, and that of the Blue Mountain Joint School on the ridge road leading from top of Mix Canyon northward and lying east of the old Suisun-Knoxville Road through Gordon Valley and Wragg Canyon. These two school districts were shared with Napa County and were contemporary in the early nineteenth hundreds with two others run jointly with Yolo County on the north and east and two with Sacramento County on the east. They were established to provide nearby schooling for the farm families living in communities bisected by county boundaries. (Even today, the northern corners of Solano County are incorporated in the Winters Unified School District and the Davis Unified School District of Yolo County and the large southeastern area of Montezuma Hills and Rio Vista is part of the River Delta Unified District of Sacramento County.)

The two Solano—Napa joint schools were similar in offering eight years of elementary schooling to a backcountry, mountain farm population. They differed, however, in the ethnic nature of their communities. Mountain Joint School founded earlier in 1886, served primarily Portuguese and Spanish settlers and played a limited community function beyond the schooling of the children. Blue Mountain Joint School served a north European ethnic mix and functioned as a center for community social activities. Although the Blue Mountain School closed its doors earlier than its neighbor of just twelve miles away, the surviving members of its brief thirty-nine-year existence have retained an attachment to its memory and have been outgoing in helping to reconstruct its history.

### The Geographical and Political Landscape

The Blue Mountain Joint School was built on the easternmost mountain of the coastal ranges of northern California.

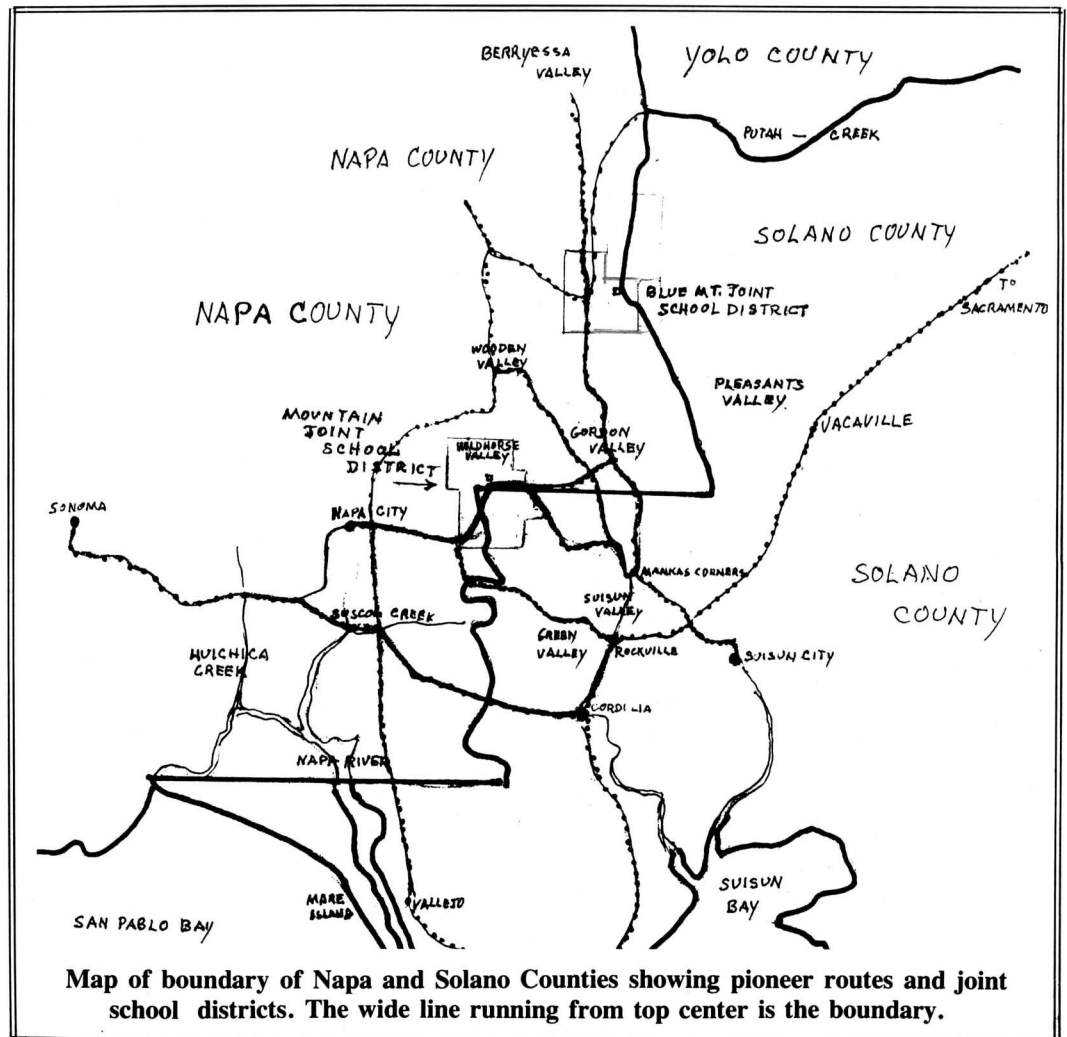
Called locally the Blue Ridge, it rises to a height of 2,500 feet above sea level and looms 400 feet above Pleasants Valley in Solano County toward the east and towers some 700 feet above Gordon Valley in Napa County on the west. It presents what would seem to be a natural barrier between the two counties, and it was so thought of in 1855 when the final boundary between the two newly formed counties was drawn along its crest. Yet neither nature nor man has been prevented by its steepness from moving across.

The recent Miller Canyon wildfire, which raged over 135,000 acres for seven searing days between September 17 and September 24, 1988, spread over the ridge from the eastern side and down the Gordon Valley slope before it was arrested. The towering plumes of smoke could be seen from Suisun Valley as it raced northward along the ridge. Few contemporaries gazing at this conflagration in the field or on television knew of the human history of this mountain area.

### The First Settlers

The earliest account of crossing the ridge is that of the pioneer Edmond Samuels, who with his wife Mary had emigrated from the hill country of northern Alabama in 1852. He settled in Gordon and Suisun Valleys and worked as a teamster hauling wheat from Gordon and Berryessa Valleys to wharves on the Napa River. The family's oral tradition relates that in 1872 he had gone prospecting for gold in Miller Canyon on the east side of the Blue Ridge and had found a rich vein of ore. On his return down the steep western slope his mule, laden with a deer carcass, fell on him and mortally injured him. He had brought back with him samples of the ore, but he was incapable on his deathbed of instructing his sons about the location of the find.

Of his eleven children, two, William Henry (1859-1944) and George W. Samuels (1862-1948), established ranches high on the Napa side of Blue Mountain and engaged in fruit growing, sheep ranch-



ing, and firewood cutting. William Henry, whose wife, Irene, was from the pioneer Coleman family of Wragg Canyon, would father nine children and his brother, George, seven. The need for local schooling became a concern for both families.

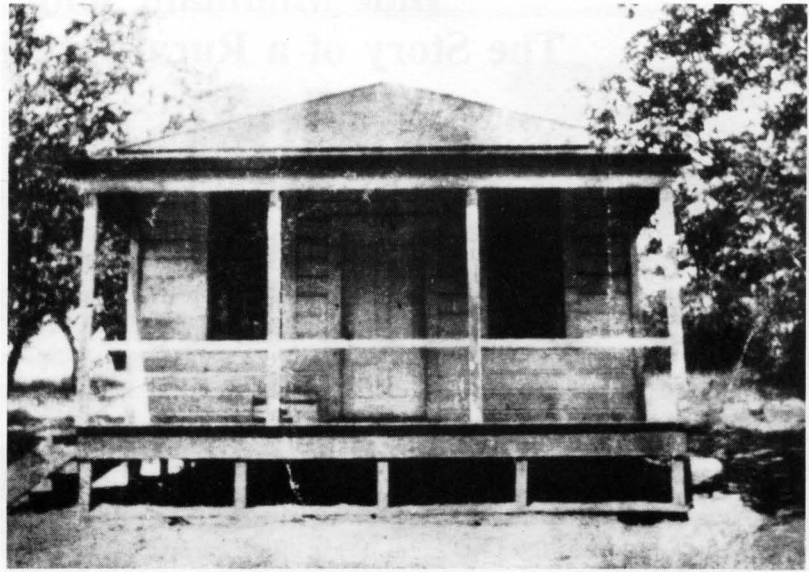
### Establishment of the Blue Mountain Joint School District

The *Vacaville Reporter* of February 15, 1896, announced "a new school district has been formed on the ridge of the Blue Mountain comprising portions of Napa and Solano counties, to be called the Blue Mountain School District. George Samuels, Duane Finley, and W.B. Davis have been appointed trustees. An election will be called shortly to vote a tax for the purpose of building a schoolhouse to cost about \$500." The tax election was duly held on the following March 14 and building of the schoolhouse was undertaken in July on an acre of land donated by William Henry Samuels. The work of construction was done by Edward Black of the Napa County side and William Mix and Vincent Murasko of the Solano County portion of the district. W.H. Samuels was also involved in the project. Building materials were hauled by horse teams and wagons up Mix Canyon from as far away as Dixon.

### The Blue Mountain Community—The Families

The pupils of the first class of the 1896-97 school year included William Henry's daughter, Maude, and George's children, Walter and Alma, from Napa County.

William Henry's second son, Archie



Blue Mountain School was built in 1896. This picture is taken from the 1935 school yearbook.

(Art), who was born in 1885, reared six children on the mountain ranch. The two youngest, Alfred (Shad) and Della, were members of the last class of Blue Mountain school.

Children from the Solano County part of the district included three of the seven children in the family of a German immigrant, Gottlieb Riehl, who had come to the United States in 1890. Five of his children would attend Blue Mountain School in this and succeeding years. The role of the common school in the Americanization and integration of immigrant children would be fulfilled again when the eleven children of Vincent Murasko attended, beginning with seven-year old Boles and six-year old Joseph in

1911.

Vincent Murasko (1867-1942) (originally spelled Muraski) emigrated from Poland in 1890 and purchased 360 acres a few miles north of the school site, where he planted vines and apples and reared his large family with his wife, the former Martha Pyszora (anglicized to Pyshora). She emigrated from Prussian Poland with her sister, Maria, in 1903. Her brother, Leopold (1890-1960), had preceded her in 1902 and had settled in 1908 on a 160-acre parcel nearby. Her sister, Maria, married to a Michael Kasprzyk (anglicized to Kasper), tried living at Blue Mountain, but found the frontier isolation uncongenial and left for San Francisco. Her son, Willie, attended the school briefly in 1912. Her daughter, Gertrude, would come back, however, to teach in 1929. As a result of this ethnic concentration, the Murasko children, although born here, were brought up speaking Polish as their primary language at home and were first exposed to English when they entered the public school. They remained bilingual and one, at least, retained a Polish accent to the present day!

The family of Ernest Fisher, an emigrant from Manitoba, Canada, played a central role in the flow of life of the Blue Mountain community. Fisher served as clerk of the school board from 1922. Located in Miller Canyon, his house and barn became a central place for social visits of the local families. His daughter, Clara, married Leo Pyshora in 1922 and bore nine children, who replenished the school population into the 1930s. Two of his sons, Carl and Earl, married the two daughters, Edith and Ruby, respectively, of the Cox family, which had arrived at Blue Moun-



Gathering 1922-1923 at schoolhouse of Samuels, Fisher, Murasko families. Ruth Jones with Leo Pyshora (top center) on "Sampson" truck. John Black, cited in Miss Capwell's pupil report, is at left front.





**Blue Mountain School class of 1920 with teacher Margaret Folsom in road in front of school. From left to right: Joe Murasko, Frank Steffensen, Annie Murasko, Victoria Murasko, Mrs. Fisher, Carol Steffensen, Valentine Murasko, unidentified, Clara Fisher, Leo Murasko, Mr. Ernest Fisher, Pete Murasko, Mrs. Steffensen, Unidentified, Unidentified, Unidentified, Carol Fisher, J.P. Steffensen (clerk of the board), Margaret Folsom (teacher).**

tain in the 1930s during the depression years. The Coxes had sought out this rural site as a way of subsisting in part on home grown produce during those underemployed years. He along with other local men earned some income from working on the county roads.

Other residents of the community were of different northern European stocks. Edward Black, a picture frame maker and a school trustee from 1912 to 1921, was born in New York state in 1860 of English parentage. His neighbor was a forty-two-year old English widow, Martha Brandenburg, whose daughter, Martha, was a pupil in the school in 1902. Two Danish families lived on the mountain: that of Carl O. Jorgensen, an early school trustee in 1902, and J.P. Steffensen, trustee during 1918-1922. The latter's children, Karl and Frank, attended the school during the years 1918 to 1921. Varied national origins can be seen in the names of other residents and pupils, such as Moreno, Cernon, Sawyer, Foltz, O'Brien, and O'Connor. The school served as a standard American "melting pot!"

One of the original three trustees of the district, William B. Davis (1828-1920), was a person of a noteworthy biography. Born in Kentucky, he farmed in Missouri during 1835-1850, immigrated overland to California and settled in Vacaville in 1854, where he was a prosperous farmer and a community leader. From 1861 to 1867 he served as a Solano County supervisor for

the Vacaville area. His presence at Blue Mountain in 1896 was apparently in the status of a retired person at age 68, living on his son George's 160-acre parcel close to the school site. He died in his ninety-second year in Vacaville.

### **The School Teachers**

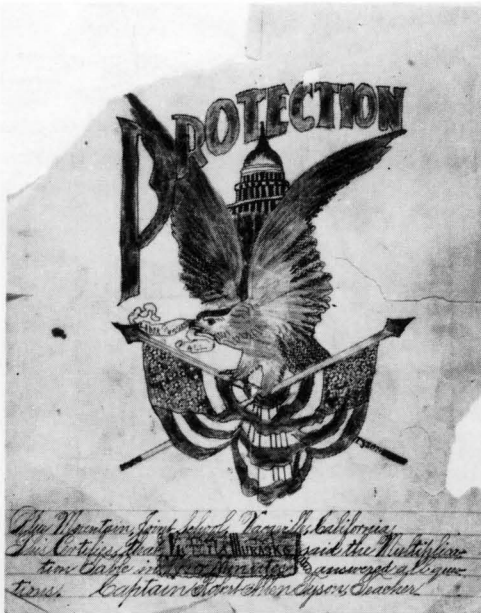
Over the thirty-nine year span of its existence from its establishment in 1896 to its final closing in 1935, twenty-seven teachers served for one or more years. All but four were women and only three of the women are identifiable as married women.

Most were likely young, single women on their first teaching assignment, if the evidence from six individuals about whom there is personal information is typical. Only five stayed more than one year, and of these three were married women. For a young and single woman an isolated mountain community must not have been a promising prospect!

The teachers about whom descriptive information could be found present personal histories and personality characteristics of salient interest. The first teacher was Clara Smyth from Santa Rosa, a twenty-seven-



**Blue Mountain boys including Peter Murasko with rifles. Late 1920s**



Honorary award to pupil Victoria Murasko designed in ink and color by teacher, Captain Robert A. Tyson.

year old spinster, who apparently enjoyed the assignment. At the beginning of her third contract in 1899, she resigned on the death of her father, Charles Smyth, former superintendent of schools of Sonoma County. She subsequently moved to live with her brother in San Francisco, where she died in 1944. Whether she continued her teaching career could not be determined.

In 1905 a sixty-year old man, James R. Tilson of Vacaville was hired. He had formerly taught in Vacaville in 1896 and Rockville in 1899. He later taught at the nearby Rhine School in Mix Canyon in 1919—20 at a ripe age of seventy-four!

In 1910, after the school had been suspended over the summer for insufficient enrollment—the requirement was a minimum of five pupils—a person, later famous in Napa County history, Eva Alice Holmes (1889-1977), came to Blue Mountain School as her first teaching experience. She later became the superintendent of schools of Napa County, serving

from 1923 to 1938. She later was a curriculum supervisor for Trinity County, after which she taught in Vallejo at Carquinez and Everest schools. Her brother was J.P. Holmes, writer of popular western fiction. She was apparently very attentive to Blue Mountain School, because the pupils dedicated their yearbook to her in 1935.

The teacher of the 1918/19 school year was a Mrs. Bertha M. Rockwell Capell who had taught earlier at the nearby Rhine School from 1911 to 1916. Her written note in her annual report on pupils progress for the superintendent to approve the graduation of a slow learner is a touching anecdote.

The teacher hired for the 1920/21 school year was a Civil War veteran, Captain Robert Allen Tyson (1841-1931). Born in Pennsylvania, he was engaged in farming in Indiana when he enlisted on October 14, 1861, in the Indiana Infantry Volunteers. On March 28, 1864, he was appointed second lieutenant in the Volunteer Forces of the United States, assigned to the 92nd Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops. He saw action in the Red River Expedition in Louisiana in May of 1864. He mustered out of service on December 31, 1865. He then lived in Indiana, Illinois, North Dakota and Washington before coming to California in 1918. From 1874 to 1893 he had fathered twelve children. His capabilities as a teacher at Blue Mountain at age 79 are suggested by testimony of Leo Murasko, his former pupil, that he used the rod heavily on the boys and fell asleep frequently during class hours, during which his charges played pranks on him, such as putting a dead mouse in his cornet, which he used to march them into the schoolhouse at the beginning of the school day. Another aspect of his teaching concern and his outlook can be seen in the carefully executed honorary award which he drew in ink and color for one of the two girls in his class, Victoria Murasko, as encouragement for her school progress.



Miss Ruth G. Jones at age 22 in 1922. She taught target practice during lunchtime to her gun-loving class of eleven boys and two girls.

The teacher for the 1922/23 school year was a very capable young woman of twenty-two years of age, Ruth G. Jones from Campbell, the granddaughter of a Benicia merchant of the 1850s to the 1870s, John Wesley Jones. Obtaining a provisional credential from U.C. Berkeley after a few months in intersession education courses, she had accepted the appointment through the Napa superintendent of schools. A small, athletic person, she related well with the eleven boys and two girls of her class. A mark of her creativity was her decision to win the boys' affection by learning to shoot and bringing firearms with her. At each noon lunchtime, she organized shooting practice in the school yard, with herself supplying the much appreciated ammunition.

Finding the school in bad condition—it may have been inactive for the preceding year—she organized a clean-up program with the students, with water for scrubbing hauled to the site, there being no water supply at the school. Finding also that the present clerk of the board, one J.P. Stefensen, had not been purchasing supplies as expected with district funds in his care, she inspired the pupils to complain to their parents, which action lead to his resignation and replacement. An oral interview with her in San Jose, where she is living

John Black has continued working in the 8th year for three school years. Can you not graduate him with the understanding that he is not capable of entering High School? He is a big boy, strong and able bodied. He will be nineteen this fall. Let him go to work. Men are needed everywhere and labors are few. He made a Napa County average of 75%. He should average 80% for promotion.

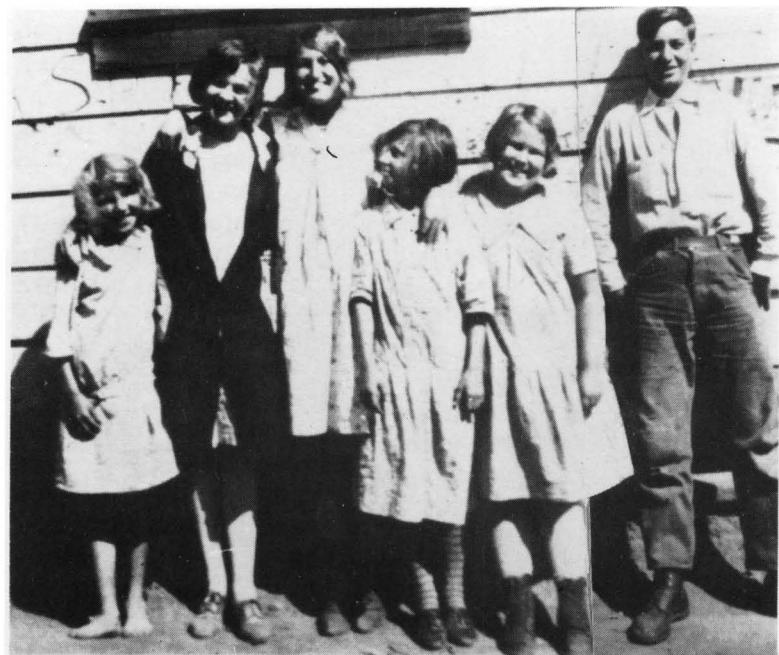
FILE THIS REPORT WITH THE COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Kind comment by Bertha M. Rockwell Capell in her pupil report ending the 1918 school year.





Pupil's sketch in 1935 "The Spotted Fawn" tells of older brother's prank played on Captain Tyson in 1920.



Blue Mountain School class of 1929-1930. From left: Antonia Murasko, Gertrude Kasper (teacher), Della Samuels, Helen Murasko, Ethel Samuels, Everett Fisher.

at eighty-eight years of age, recounts the many happy times and fine associations she had with the pupils and families of the district.

As related above, Gertrude Kasper, a daughter of one of the early residents, obtained her first teaching position at Blue Mountain in 1929 through her connection with her uncle, Leopold Pyshora, who was then clerk of the Board of Trustees. She was encouraged by the superintendent of schools, Dan H. White, however, to transfer the following year to a larger school in Collinsville, where she taught for several years. Thereafter, she taught in San Jose and La Honda. She is retired now and living in Burlingame.

The last teacher of Blue Mountain School was Miss Viola Carter from Oakland, a woman in her twenties. With a small class of six pupils, she accomplished some remarkable achievements of progressive education: namely, a student weekly newspaper, a yearbook, a letter writing program to schools in other states, with flowers, pictures, and fruits as exhibits, and the making of gifts for the children's wing of a local hospital! The yearbook and the newspaper are a unique source of information on the role of the school in the Blue Mountain community, revealing the social and dramatic activities, the annual joint visit of the two superintendents, Eva Holmes of Napa and Dan H. White of Solano County, and the activity of the music supervisor, Miss Anna Kyle, in directing the annual music week program. Miss Carter subsequently married and taught for ten years in San Benito County as Mrs. Zundell.

### Epilogue

The following excerpt from an oral interview with Mrs. Helen Pyshora Enos, who lived at Blue Mountain from 1926 to 1935, and who was a pupil in the last class of Blue Mountain School, expresses the

quality of life at the school and in the community.

"School to me was a great adventure and pleasurable. The teachers were dedicated and loved their work. We learned, had fun, and discipline was easy to accept. And the



Leo Murasko of Vacaville and Victoria (Murasko) Shona of Smartville, California, the two oldest living former pupils of the Blue Mountain School. Fall 1988.



Miss Eva Alice Holmes (1889-1977) picture taken about 1907



Blue Mountain School 1933—Pupil cleaning detail. In back are Ethel Samuels, Helen Murasko, Della Samuels. In front are Josephine Pyshora, Helen Pyshora, Antonia Murasko.

parents of the children were involved most of the time. I'm sure the teachers and the parents were equally responsible.

"We walked home from school almost always, four miles. We very seldom walked to school. We rode our Suzy mule sometimes, with Dad beside us. Rode in the wagon with the mules pulling us many times. Mostly Dad drove us to school in our new Model A. Mom drove our Suzy mule and sled to school for one of our holidays and brought a cake for the occasion. We had school parties for all the parents, and neighbors were invited. Most every one came always and brought refreshments.

"Near the end of the school year, Dad would take the Sampson truck to the bottom of Mix Canyon to pick up school officials for their annual visit—up until the last year of Blue Mountain School in 1935, when the truck was disabled. Many times I stayed with the Fishers, my grandparents, and their children, my uncles, and went to school from there. I don't remember all the reasons. Sometimes Mom and Dad would take a trip to San Francisco where Dad's family lived. Mother's sisters and brothers and Grandma Fisher always had Mom at her house for the birth of four of my brothers and sisters. Mrs. Samuels was there also. Mom and Dad eventually had nine of us. We never missed school at Blue

Mountain unless the roads were impassable or there was a dire emergency in the family. We were the only family without running water. There was no water at the school. So all the families supplied the drinking and hand-washing water. From our vantage point of the school we could view the Sierras and Mount Shasta, except when the weather was bad. With all the quietness, except the nature sounds, we could hear a vehicle approaching for miles.

"All the families raised chickens, cows, pigs, horses or mules, or both. Our crops were grapes, walnuts, cherries, pears, prunes, peaches, apples, and berries. Most all families had the same types of crops. The Fisher side of the Blue Mountains faced east, overlooking Vaca Valley and beyond, so they raised mostly apricots, which needed a warmer climate than our valleys. Ours was a good apple country. The Muraskos were noted for their apples. Always had deer and rabbit problems. They loved the leaves and shoots of our orchards and gardens. So we ate them! We never irrigated the orchards so the fruit had all its natural flavor. Hiking and walking was one of my favorite pastimes. And we walked barefoot, at least all summer. Many times we had to hike to bring the milk cows home. For many years in fall of the year, the Fishers would have the gathering of neighbors and a barn dance

in their large fruit shed.

"It was good life, but the parents worked day and night to make a living for us. We're all the richer for their love." [note: The Pyshora house was destroyed in the Miller Canyon fire of September 1988.]

#### Acknowledgements

An attempt to locate the abandoned site of Blue mountain School was successful through the guidance of Mr. Bob Allen of the Vacaville Heritage Council. His photographs of the visit depict the present appearance of site, completely overgrown with brush and forest, revealing no traces of its active human occupancy, except for a crushed chimney cap from the school's external chimney and an outline of rocks that once enclosed a small flower garden.

Mr. Bert Hughes produced from the Heritage Council's file a copy of a *Vacaville Reporter* article by John Rico, dated January 13, 1975, on the history of the school, based on an interview with a venerable couple, Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Riehl, who were among the first students to attend. It included a photograph of the former schoolhouse!

With this start, research was pursued in

(continued on back page)

See further report in Blue  
Mtn School in Vol 2 No 2, Dec 1993



# Vallejo's Brick, Tile, and Terra Cotta Industries

By Thomas Lucy

In the early years of the state brickyards sprang up wherever there was a local market.<sup>1</sup> Clay suitable for brick and sewer pipe was available near almost all centers of population. Efforts to make brick in Vallejo during the early years failed because parties unused to the business put into the market bricks which were of an inferior quality.<sup>2</sup>

One of the early kilns, built in the 1850s, was located near the foot of Tennessee Street in the area now known as St. Francis Park. Because of the kiln, the area around the foot of Tennessee Street for many years was known as "the brickyard".<sup>3</sup>

In 1871 J.G. Hanks established a kiln on Maryland Street. On September 4, 1872, Hanks completed his second kiln, which contained 475,000 bricks. The demand for bricks was so great that Hanks could supply only a small amount of bricks required by the community.<sup>4 5 6</sup> The brickyard was probably located near the intersection of Maryland and El Dorado Streets where a fine source of clay was available. Maryland Street is now Curtola Parkway.

As early as 1872 it was recognized that the clay in the Vallejo area was unsurpassed for making brick and that the clay was in great abundance.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the many millions of bricks which were used to build the navy yard on Mare Island and the city of Vallejo were imported. On Mare Island the shop buildings, officer's quarters, walkways and retaining walls were made with brick.

The first brick building in Vallejo was erected by W.C. Greeves in 1856, near the corner of Santa Clara and Georgia Streets.

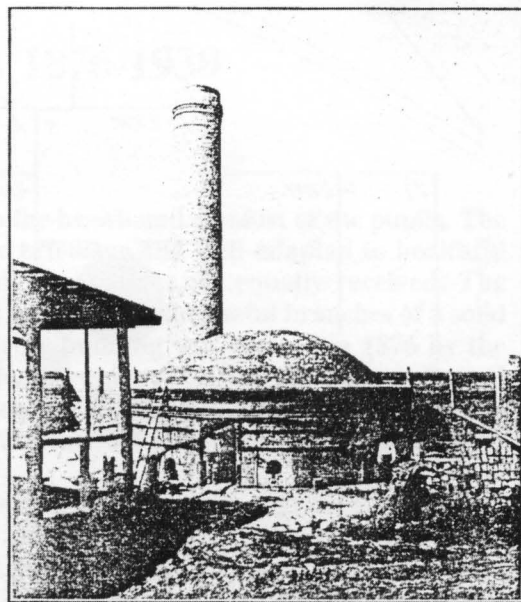
The next was a house on Maine Street, then in 1859 the Metropolitan Hotel,<sup>8</sup> which many Vallejo residents remember as the Astor House. Brick buildings still standing which were built with imported bricks are the I.O.O.F. Building and St. Vincent's Church.

Commenting on all this the *Vallejo Evening Chronicle* on July 11, 1872, complained "That Vallejo has the best brick earth around is admitted, yet during the past year we paid other places thousands of dollars for bricks used in the buildings constructed in Vallejo. On the Frisbie Block there were 1,400,000 bricks which were imported. On the I.O.O.F. Building, Jenk's Building, Farragut Building and others there were at least 1,000,000 imported bricks. The thousands of dollars which were paid to San Francisco, Sacramento and other places could and ought to have been made in Vallejo".

In 1889 and 1890 three brickyards were established in Vallejo. These brickyards and others which followed produced bricks which were among the finest known.

In 1899 the Union Pressed Brick and Terra Cotta Company was incorporated.<sup>9</sup> The brickyard was located on thirty-five acres of land with its physical plant located at the then intersection of El Dorado Street and Solano Avenue on the shoreline of the Bay between Vallejo and South Vallejo. The streets no longer intersect and the Bay has been filled in. The superintendent of works, Alphonse Le Jeune, had operated terra cotta works in Belgium, France and Germany and had been in charge of the Northeastern Terra Cotta Works in Chicago. Mr. Le Jeune declared the Vallejo clay the finest he had ever worked with and that there was an inexhaustible supply of terra cotta clay.

The plant had five large three-story buildings, each 135' x 50' for the works and at its south end a shed of the same



**Bee Hive Kiln—Vallejo Brick and Tile Company**

dimensions which contained bricks in stock. There was a mammoth double shipping shed. Bricks were run out on a 1800 ft. trestle in tram cars, then loaded on scows or ships for shipment. Five brick kilns had a capacity of 50,000 bricks each.

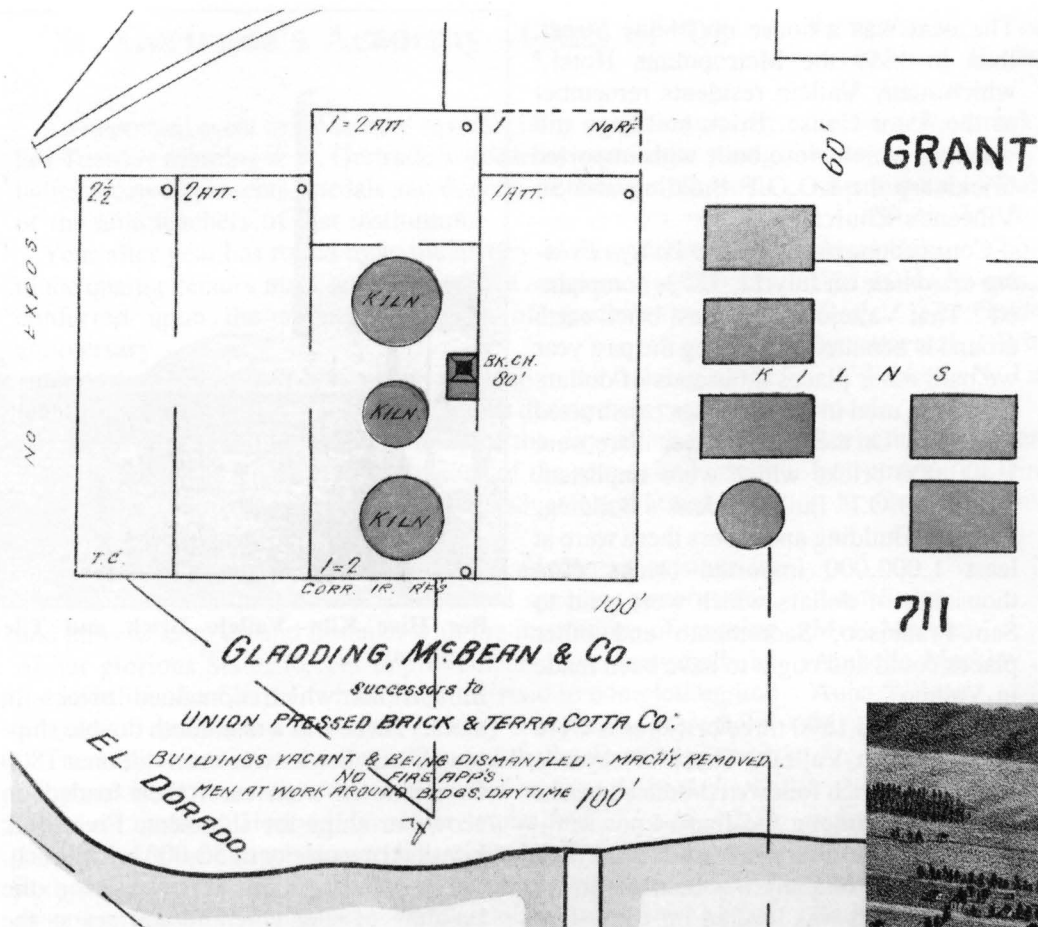
The plant produced bricks for the building of such splendid edifices as the Crocker, Mills, and Fair Buildings in San Francisco and the School of Fine Arts in San Diego. The plant built a terra cotta altar for the St. John's Episcopal Church in San Francisco which was destroyed when the church was dynamited during the 1906 fire. One visitor to the plant noticed many fine terra cotta artifacts including a medallion honoring Sara Bernhardt.

The shale clay was rich in iron and the products of disintegration or weathering of silicious rocks. The clay contained 60 parts silica, 30 parts alumina, and the remainder, oxides of iron, magnesia, water, and impurities.<sup>10</sup>

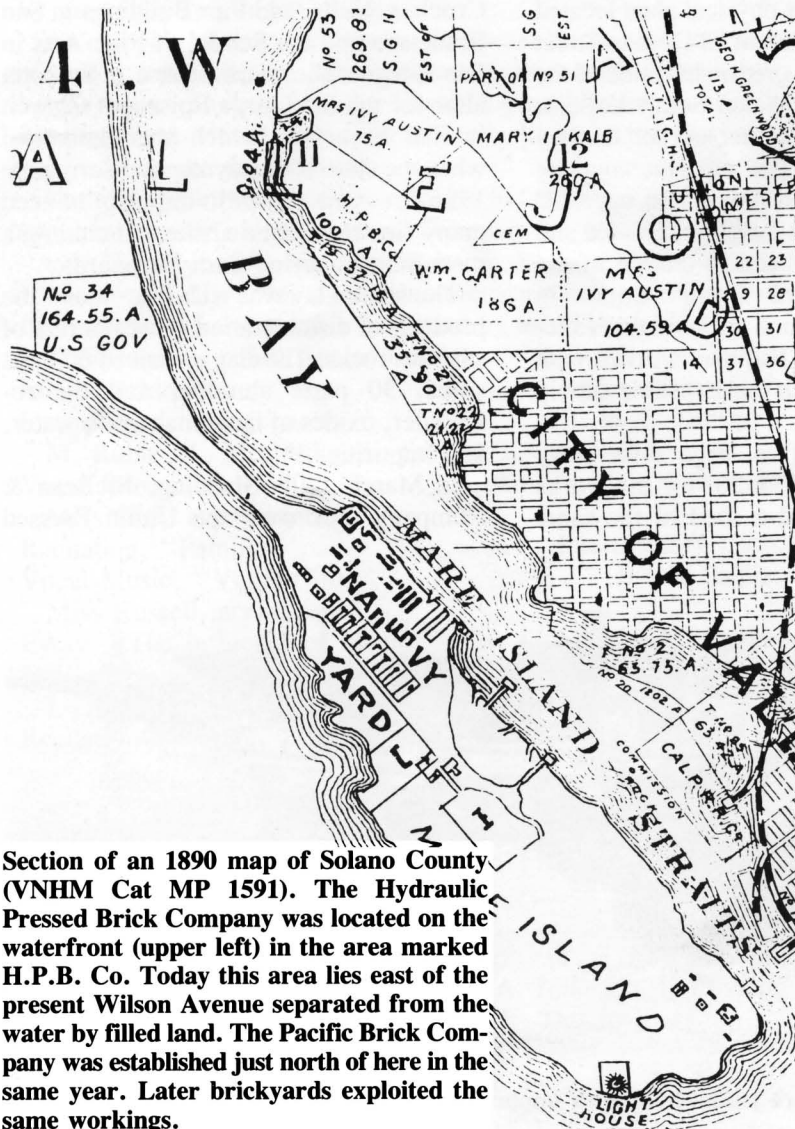
In March 1896 Gladding, McBean & Company took over the Union Pressed



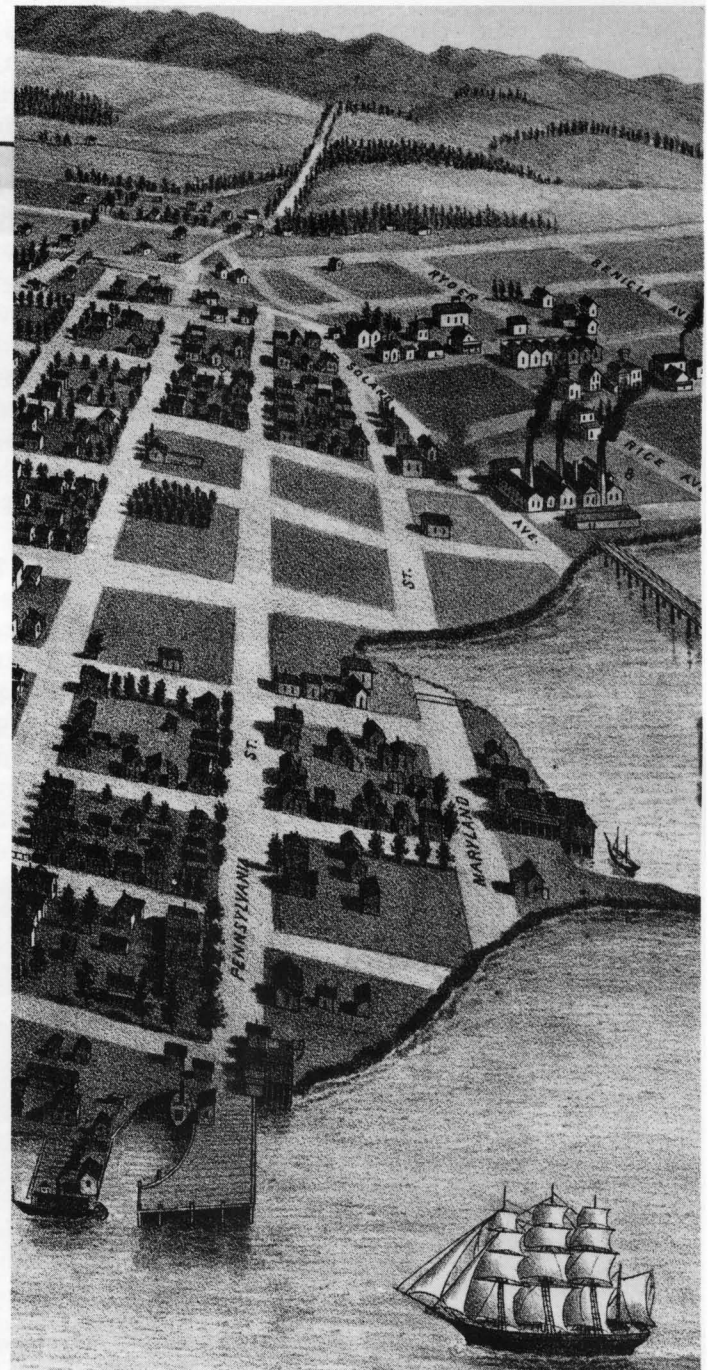
**A few of the brick buildings on Mare Island built with imported bricks**



At left: Portion of 1901 Sanborn Fire Insurance map showing that the Gladding, McBean & Company buildings were being dismantled after removal of machinery



Section of an 1890 map of Solano County (VNHM Cat MP 1591). The Hydraulic Pressed Brick Company was located on the waterfront (upper left) in the area marked H.P.B. Co. Today this area lies east of the present Wilson Avenue separated from the water by filled land. The Pacific Brick Company was established just north of here in the same year. Later brickyards exploited the same workings.



Below: The Union Pressed Brick and Terra Cotta Company at Solano Avenue and El Dorado Street is the group of buildings belching smoke in line with the wharf on the right. From a Birdseye View of Vallejo—1891





**This photograph, ca 1920, shows the Stieger brickworks. Note the long pier above the plane's wings. At the right of the of the brickyard is Bay Terrace, built in World War I by the US Government on land purchased from the brick companies.<sup>24</sup>**

Brick and Terra Cotta Company. Gladding, McBean, which is still operating in Lincoln, California, has no record of producing clay products in Vallejo. It issued orders in June 1896 to begin moving equipment to Lincoln.<sup>11</sup> The Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Vallejo for 1901 shows the buildings vacant and being dismantled.

The two brickyards which were established in 1890 were located on the east side of what is now Wilson Avenue. They covered the area now occupied by the northern part of Bay Terrace and extended to the present intersection of Wilson Avenue and Sears Point Road.<sup>12</sup>

The Hydraulic Pressed Brick Company was incorporated on July 21, 1890.<sup>13</sup> It was located on 300 acres of land. The plant had the capability of producing 40,000 bricks daily, most of which were delivered to San Francisco. A 40' x 200' wharf was built at which point ships would load bricks for transport. The plant employed from sixty to one hundred men.<sup>14</sup>

The Pacific Brick Company was incorporated on October 30, 1890.<sup>15</sup> It was located on seventy-five acres of land just north of the Hydraulic Pressed Brick Company. The Pacific Brick Company looked to San Francisco as a market for its product. When the first 250,000 bricks were fired, they were of such a fine quality that many were carried home by visitors.<sup>16</sup>

Two brick companies were established after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. They were the Houze Brick and Tile Company and the Vallejo Brick and Tile Company, which exploited the workings of the previous two brickyards along Wilson Avenue.

The Houze Brick and Tile Company, also known as the Fire Pressed Brick Company was incorporated on August 4, 1906.<sup>17</sup> It was located on fifty acres of land. Its capacity was 10,000 bricks per day. The plant ceased operation in 1909.<sup>18</sup>



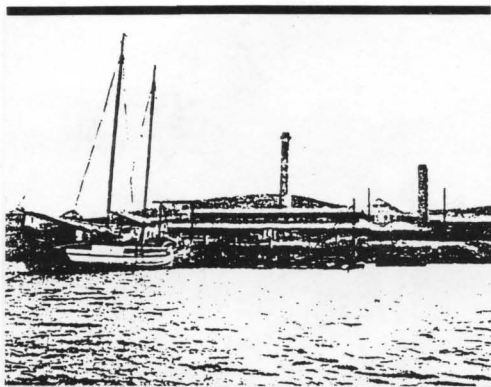
**The large Astor Hotel, originally named Metropolitan Hotel, was built in 1859 with imported bricks. The building was razed in the 1960s.**

There is a conflict here because the Houze Brick and Tile Company was carried in the Vallejo Directories until the 1912/1913 edition.

The Vallejo Brick and Tile Company was incorporated on November 8, 1907 and October 30, 1908.<sup>19</sup> The plant had a water frontage of over 1500 feet on Mare Island Strait, just north of the Houze Brick and Tile Company. Its location in the Mexican era was an embarcadero for the shipment of hides and tallow. The property upon which the plant was built consisted of fifty acres of upland and eleven acres of tidelands. The shale from which the bricks were made was found on the waterfront, rising inland to 110 feet above the water. It was known as kidney shale. The principal shale, blue in color, attains a depth of seventy-four feet near the waterfront. Yellow shale extends from the waterfront inland to the highest elevation. A report estimated that fifty acres upland had enough shale to produce 20,000,000

bricks a year for a vast period of time. An analysis showed that bricks produced in the plant were almost identical to the celebrated bricks made in Ohio. The paving bricks made by the company had the hardness of glass, extreme toughness, and were the most enduring known. At its peak the plant could produce 900,000 bricks per month.

Tests of the brick by Smith, Emery and Company, the City Departments of San Francisco and Oakland, and by Mare Island proved that the bricks exceeded standard requirements by 100%. All tests proved that bricks from the Vallejo Brick and Tile were as good as those produced in eastern kilns. The market for the bricks was almost unlimited. The City of San Francisco required 30,000,000 bricks for reconstruction of her sewer system, and for gutters preliminary to paving the streets. The Oakland Traction Company ordered bricks from the Vallejo Brick and Tile Company for runners along their street car



Schooner loading brick at the Vallejo Brick and Tile Company for San Francisco market.

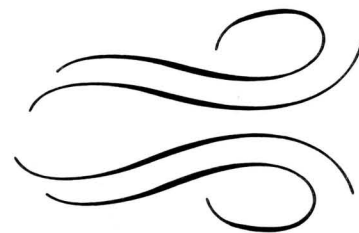
tracks. In 1910 two million bricks were used for that purpose. The bricks produced for sewer and paving were not excelled by any plant in the United States.<sup>20</sup> The plant closed in 1913 due to water and labor troubles. Water from the Vallejo City mains cost from \$75 to \$100 per month.<sup>21</sup>

The workings along Wilson Avenue remained vacant until late in the decade, at which time Steiger Brick Company purchased the properties of the Vallejo Brick and Tile Company. Steiger made improvements to the kilns and plant. The company produced an excellent quality of brick but mismanagement of the company's affairs resulted in suspension of operation in 1923.<sup>22 23</sup> Steiger was the last to operate in the Vallejo area. For many years a cliff at the intersection of Wilson Avenue and Sears Point Road was the only visible evidence of the brickyards, showing that an enormous amount of earth was removed. The area was leveled in the mid 1980s for the building of Bridgeport and Lighthouse homes.

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## Blue Mountain Joint School

(Continued from page 24)

Napa County school records preserved in the Napa County Historical Society's library directed by Mr. Jess Doud. Mrs. Virginia Wakeman, librarian of the Napa Valley Genealogical and Biographical Society located essential information on Eva Holmes. Solano County resources used included the files of the Vacaville Heritage Council and the Solano County Genealogical Society. School records held in the Solano County Office of Education, as well as in the minutes of the Solano County Board of Supervisors, revealed the scope and structure of this educational enterprise. Remarkably, where official records were missing, especially before the year 1912, documents in the form of a pupils' yearbook and a file of their school newspapers filled in missing facts about teachers, pupils and school and community activities. I am indebted to Mrs. Ruth

Bradani, the Mmes. Edith and Ruby Cox Fisher, and to Mr. Bob Pyshora and Mrs. Josephine Pyshora Griffin for making these documents, as well as family photographs, available. Mr. Bob Allen has skillfully photocopied such items for research and publication.

Oral interviews were then arranged with former teachers, Mmes. Ruth Jones Heinz and Gertrude Kasper Paniak, as well as with former pupils, Mr. Leo Murasko, Mrs. Victoria Murasko Shona, Mrs. Della Samuels Conner, Mmes. Edith and Ruby Cox Fisher and Mrs. Helen Pyshora Enos. Through them the experience of life on Blue Mountain was vividly restated.

Corrections to last issue Granville Swift article:  
Page 1, column 1, line 15—1864 should read 1846.  
Page 2, column 3, line 11—1846 should read 1848.  
Page 28, column 2 -Footnote 23 should be deleted and following footnotes moved up with footnotes 24 and 25 becoming footnotes 23 and 24.

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